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Womb Phantasies in International Horror and Extreme Cinema

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Womb Phantasies in International Horror and Extreme Cinema

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at King's College London

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between womb phantasies and the proliferation of womb and birth symbolism in international horror and extreme cinema from the mid-twentieth to early twenty-first century. It presents a new cross-national reading of this symbolism as revealing the oppressed and repressed desire to return to the early mother-child dyad, through the use of culturally specific psychoanalytic theory. Chapter 1 outlines the position of the womb phantasy in Freud's work, providing the critical engagement with this founding theory necessary for the ensuing cross-cultural readings of film and psychoanalytic theory. Subsequent chapters then trace the presence of the womb phantasy in key films from France, America, South Korea and Japan. Chapter 2 establishes the background for the womb phantasy by exploring the representation of the primal phantasies in French cinema, providing a critique of the patriarchal construction of femininity and motherhood using the work of Irigaray, Kristeva and Anzieu. Chapter 3 evaluates the representation of symbiotic mother-child relationships in American horror as symbolic of the womb phantasy, using the work of Mahler, Chodorow and Horney. Chapter 4 questions what happens when this symbiosis is interrupted, with the research of Min, Chung and Cho enabling an analysis of the motifs of abortion, infanticide and death in key films from South Korea. Chapter 5 then shows how the womb is presented as a liminal space between life and death in Japanese cinema with reference to the work of Kitayama, before exploring the correlation between Doi's theory of *amae* and the womb phantasy. This thesis thus combines close filmic analysis with psychoanalytic theory to pinpoint the consistencies and variations in the international obsession with the womb in horror and extreme cinema, whilst simultaneously providing the first detailed study of how womb phantasies have become ingrained in psychoanalytic theory across the world.

Contents	
Acknowledgements	5
Illustrations	6
Introduction	8
Psychoanalysis and Horror Cinema	12
Feminism and Horror: The Return of the Repressed Maternal	18
The Womb Phantasy in International Horror and Extreme Cinema	23
Chapter 1. The Womb Phantasy: Freud's Repressed Maternal Legacy	31
The Womb Phantasy	31
Freud's Cupboard and the Birth of the Oedipus Complex	36
The Womb and Oedipal Desire	40
The Womb Phantasy and the Search for Origins: Freud and the Wolf-Man	47
The Horror of the Desire for the Maternal Womb	54
The Urge to Restore an Earlier State of Things: The Death Drive, Cinematic Pleasure and the Womb Phantasy	58
Conclusion	68
Chapter 2. Phantasies of Origin: France	70
The Cinema of the Maternal Body	71
The Origin of (Wo)Man: Breillat, Irigaray and the Primal Phantasy of Origin	76
The Two-Faced Mother: Kristeva and the Abject Womb in French Horror Cinema	97
The Touch of the Mother: Didier Anzieu and the Skin Ego	112
Conclusion	131
Chapter 3. Monstrous Mothers and the Mother Hero: America	133
The Great Mistake: Psychoanalysis in America	134

“A Boy’s Best Friend is his Mother”: Symbiosis and Maternal Love	141
The Fear of What’s Inside: Haunted House and occult Films, Male Crisis, and the Need to Run from the Womb	166
“It Was Here When We Moved In”: The Retro-Occult Film and Karen Horney’s ‘Dread of Woman’	180
Conclusion	189
Chapter 4. Mother-Power, Non-Mothers and the Mother Bond: South Korea	191
A New Frontier: The International Language of Horror and the Unconscious	192
<i>Mo-Jeong</i> , Motherhood and Socially Sanctioned Monstrosity	204
<i>A Tale of Two Sisters</i>	225
Conclusion	237
Chapter 5. Sacks, Wells and Water Tanks: Japan	239
The Focus on the Mother in Japanese Horror Cinema and Psychoanalysis	239
Transience and the Womb: Maternal Symbolism in the work of Nakata Hideo and Kitayama Osamu	247
What is Wrong with the ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’?: Miike Takashi And the Japanese Need to <i>Amaeru</i>	274
Conclusion	297
Conclusion	299
Appendix	311
Filmography	320
Bibliography of works by Sigmund Freud	325
Bibliography	327

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Sue Bryan, Rachel Ekins and Angela Warner

Illustrations

Figure 2.1: Alice's self-reflection in <i>A Real Young Girl</i>	84
Figure 2.2: Marie as the Freudian void in <i>Romance</i>	88
Figure 2.3: 'The man' inspects the visual sign of a woman's activity in the creation of life in <i>Anatomy of Hell</i>	95
Figures 2.4 and 2.5: The mother as abject border in <i>Inside</i>	104
Figure 2.6: Yasmin embraces her inner abjectivity in <i>Frontier(s)</i>	107
Figure 2.7: Skin-on-skin contact between mother and daughter in <i>See the Sea</i>	115
Figure 2.8: Tatiana's corrupt Skin Ego	124
Figures 2.9 and 2.10: The contrasting faces of motherhood	127
Figures 2.11 and 2.12: Womb symbolism in <i>See the Sea</i>	128
Figure 3.1: Norman's constant eating fends off the devouring mother	152
Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4: Visual representations of the symbiotic union	158
Figure 3.5: Mrs White, the monstrous mother of the symbiotic union	160
Figures 3.6 and 3.7: Carrie's womb-space is both a source of horror, and of love	165
Figures 3.8 - 3.12: Wendy helps Danny escape from the possessed Jack (and from the symbiotic union)	172
Figures 3.13, 3.14 and 3.15: Womb, vagina and birth symbolism in <i>Poltergeist</i>	125
Figures 3.16 and 3.17: Houses that bleed	178
Figure 3.18: The haunted cupboard in <i>The Conjuring</i>	183
Figure 3.19: Carolyn's maternal rapture	189
Figures 4.1 and 4.2: The staircase separates the traditional domain of the mother downstairs, and the temptation of Myong-ja and modernity upstairs	212
Figure 4.3: Comparison of <i>jeong</i> and love	221
Figure 4.4: The haunted cupboard in <i>A Tale of Two Sisters</i>	226

Figures 4.5 and 4.6: Uncanny images: womb symbolism and doubling	227
Figures 5.1 and 5.2: Watery tombs in <i>Ring</i> and <i>Dark Water</i>	247
Figures 5.3 - 5.6: The looming exterior and damp interior of Yoshimi and Ikuko's apartment in <i>Dark Water</i>	258
Figures 5.7 and 5.8: Mitsuko and Sadako's watery re-births in <i>Dark Water</i> and <i>Ring</i>	264
Figures 5.9 - 5.11 <i>Dark Water</i> (2005) recreating the damp aesthetic of its source material	268
Figure 5.12 Miike references <i>Dark Water</i> in <i>One Missed Call</i>	282
Figures 5.13 and 5.14: An insane Christopher sees an aborted fetus in his water bucket in <i>Imprint</i>	285
Figure 5.15: Asami's exterior womb in <i>Audition</i>	288
Figure 5.16: Asami performs the role of loving mother in <i>Audition</i>	292
Figures 5.17 and 5.18: Keiko rediscovers her maternity and Takuya's womb-like cupboard in <i>Visitor Q</i>	295
Figure 5.19: Returning to the womb and the maternal embrace in <i>Visitor Q</i>	296

Introduction

In his influential essay on horror cinema Robin Wood writes: “the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilisation *represses* or *oppresses*”.¹ That which is hidden in the unconscious or denied by society, emerges and is experienced in the safe environment of the cinema, depicted as a thing of horror so that it can be rejected or repressed once more. It should be no surprise, then, that the figure of the mother and the theme of her reproductive powers pervade these films. We are all encouraged to love our mothers, yet patriarchal society survives on us not loving them too much.

The importance of the maternal to the horror genre has attracted a wealth of scholarly research on the topic. Barbara Creed’s book *The Monstrous-Feminine* stands as an exemplary text on how women are presented as abject in the genre due to both their reproductive abilities, and the fear that they may threaten phallic domination through castration.² The mother is also constantly present in the background of Carol Clover’s discussion of cross-gender identification and horror cinema in *Men, Women and Chain Saws*.³ More recently, the mother is a key figure in Sue Short’s exploration of horror film narratives as female rites of passage in *Misfit Sisters*, whilst Sarah Arnold’s book *Maternal Horror Film* analyses the roles of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mother in American and Japanese horror cinema.⁴ However, considering the large body of scholarship on the mother in horror cinema, and the

¹ Robin Wood, ‘An Introduction to the American Horror Film,’ in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* ed. by Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 113.

² Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).

³ Sue Short, *Misfit Sisters: Screen Horrors as Female Rites of Passage* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Carol J. Clover, *Men Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁴ Sarah Arnold, *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood* (London: Palgrave Macmillan: 2013).

widely held proposition that it is her reproductive powers that inspire her monstrous properties, little attention has been paid to the organ that actually allows her to reproduce: the womb. Although Creed does highlight the importance of the womb as an uncanny element in the horror narrative that reveals a ‘phallic panic’ over a power that man is never able to assume, her work focuses more on the fear that the womb gives rise to, rather than any desire to return to it.⁵ In contrast, I propose that the womb is a key symbolic motif across international horror and extreme cinema that is bound to both a fear of the maternal reproductive powers *and* a love for the mother.

This thesis proposes that the womb phantasy – the desire to return to the maternal womb – is an important theme in the horror genre. Through close filmic analysis it will reveal the patterns and consistencies in the relationship with the womb displayed in films from four countries across the world: France, America, South Korea and Japan. Through the application of culturally specific psychoanalytic theory it will examine the varied representations of this primal phantasy within a range of films from each of the countries, critically engaging with the use of psychoanalysis in a cross-national approach.⁶ This theoretically-led filmic analysis enables the womb phantasy to be regarded not as a sexual desire directed towards the parents – as Freud argued – but as the wish to return to the symbiotic union between mother and child that exists in early childhood. The majority of discussions on the mother in horror cinema have been bound to surface readings of the films that position the mother and the maternal as purely monstrous, abject, or deadly. I propose that in the womb symbolism of the horror film the repressed love for the mother seeps through into conscious experience, creating positive as well as negative representations.

⁵ Barbara Creed, *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2005).

⁶ The psychoanalysts whose work is used in each chapter produced that work whilst in residence in the country in question, or the work specifically concerns the citizens of that country.

In *The Monstrous-Feminine* Creed writes: “The womb is horrifying *per se* and within patriarchal discourses it has been used to represent woman’s body as marked, impure and a part of the natural/animal world”.⁷ I propose that it is not that simple. Through an analysis of womb symbolism in film and narratives that contain maternal themes this thesis will demonstrate the importance of positive representations of the womb as a space of safety and love. Furthermore, there is another key element to this mythical womb that has not been covered in existing scholarship on horror and extreme cinema. I propose that the mythical womb is represented on film as a portal to the liminal space between life and death, having both the positive connotations of allowing for contact with loved ones after their passing, as well as potentially dangerous interactions with the spirit world. Womb symbols such as cupboards or bodies of water are positioned as sites of death or gateways through which ghosts and other entities are able to re-enter into the living world. Therefore the womb is represented as being bound by a number of dialectical relationships: physical and mythical, deadly and life giving, a portal to somewhere beyond life and a point of origin. It is not as simple as saying that the womb is ‘horrifying *per se*’; rather, there is a need to explore why and how it is represented as horrifying, and to recognise that there do exist conscious examples and unconscious slippages where the repressed love for the oppressed mother escapes into patriarchal culture.

Horror cinema, I argue, clearly reveals a split created by patriarchal society between the biological and abject body of the mother, and the mythical womb-space of the maternal. This mythical womb is not the actual female reproductive organ, but a symbol of the symbiotic union of the mother-child dyad in earliest infancy. It is what is brought to mind when thinking of the womb as a safe and comforting space, acting

⁷ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 49.

as a point of origin that allows patriarchal society to unconsciously separate itself from the 'abject' nature of the biological female reproductive organs. I propose that there are different manifestations of this divide between the abject body of the mother and the mythical maternal in all four countries studied, and it will therefore form one of the key themes of this thesis. Through a proper understanding of the role of the womb phantasy in the psyche, horror cinema can be re-approached and a new explanation revealed for the constant return to mother figures and maternal themes in the films. Furthermore, when such an analysis is carried out across varying nations, patterns can be revealed that express the consistencies in the international visual and thematic manifestations of the desire to return to the early symbiotic union.

In his paper on infantile genital organisation Sigmund Freud argues that for little boys there is only one genital organ, the penis. He asserts that the 'horror' of the castrated woman, punished by the removal of her penis, is consciously surmounted in puberty with the conception of maleness and femaleness and an understanding of procreation. The active masculine has the penis, the passive feminine receives it, and the focus on the female genitals shifts from the exterior to the interior: "The vagina is now valued as a place of shelter for the penis; it enters into the heritage of the womb".⁸ But what is this heritage of which Freud speaks? Through a critical engagement with Freudian theory, this thesis will demonstrate how Freud consistently alluded to the womb as a mythical place as a means to cover over the power that this organ holds, both as a point of origin of humankind, and as a symbol of the primary love between mother and child.

⁸ Freud, 'The Infantile Genital Organisation: An Interpolation into the Theory of Sexuality,' [1923] *S.E.* XIX, 145.

Psychoanalysis and Horror Cinema

Having been born within the same period, the relationship between psychoanalysis and cinema has been one, in Robert Stam's words, of a "long flirtation".⁹ *Studies on Hysteria* by Freud and Josef Breuer, the foundational text of psychoanalysis, was published in 1895, the same year that saw the birth of cinema. Both discoveries show a turn to narrative. As Vicky Lebeau writes, it was Freud's time studying under Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière in 1885 that allowed him to move beyond the spectacle of hysteria as purely visual and instead to attempt to interpret it, "not to look, and look again, but to listen for the story – wishful, anxious, traumatic – embedded in the image."¹⁰ Building on Charcot's rejection of the links between the womb and hysteria, Freud – in his work with Breuer – began to focus on the power of the mind to create illness, the existence of the unconscious, symbolism, and the healing potential of the interpretation of talking using free association.

It is this method of interpretation that distinguishes psychoanalytic film criticism. It was in the 1970s that psychoanalytic analyses of cinema rose to the fore of film studies, pioneered by the French journal *Communications* and the British journal *Screen*, which championed the Lacanian-influenced theories of semiology and identification discussed by Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry. Although canonical essays such as Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' still heavily referenced Freud, it was the work of Jacques Lacan that equally served as an inspiration for many of these approaches.¹¹ Almost instantaneously a line was drawn between those who applied psychoanalysis and those who resolutely renounced its use

⁹ Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 159.

¹⁰ Vicky Lebeau, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Play of Shadows* (London: Wallflower, 2001), 21.

¹¹ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' [1975] in: *Feminism and Film* ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also: Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* [1977], trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) and Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)' [1965] trans. by Jacqueline Rose, *Screen* 18, no. 4 (1977).

in film studies. In 1976 four members of the Board of *Screen* resigned due to the “general lack of any critical distance from psychoanalysis” in the journal, and the assumption that it is a science and therefore is a truth that needs not to be tested.¹² In the statement preceding their resignation the board members argued against the obscurity in the language and theories of Lacan and his followers, saying that it demoralises readers and is inaccessible to those without an in-depth knowledge of Lacanian psychoanalysis.¹³

Since 1976 psychoanalytic interpretations of film have been at once both popular and denounced. Throughout the 1980s feminist scholars such as Teresa de Lauretis, Mary Ann Doane and Kaja Silverman utilised psychoanalysis in their work on film spectatorship.¹⁴ In the 1990s edited collections by critics such as Janet Bergstrom and E. Ann Kaplan attempted to develop the approach beyond Freud and Lacan and show the variety in the field, whilst individual texts have been written on subjects including the relation between film and dreams, the psyche, identification, and the representation of women to name but a few key areas of study.¹⁵ However critics of the approach have also been numerous. Leading the charge against psychoanalytic approaches to film are David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, with their anthology *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, their choice of title suggesting that the damage caused by psychoanalysis has been so great that the field as a whole needs to be

¹² Edward Buscombe et al., ‘Statement: Psychoanalysis and Film,’ *Screen* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1975-6), 119. For their statement of resignation see: Edward Buscombe et al., ‘Why We Have Resigned from the Board of Screen,’ *Screen* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1976).

¹³ Buscombe et al., ‘Statement: Psychoanalysis and Film.’

¹⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1987); Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹⁵ Janet Bergstrom, ed., *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1990). For examples of the variety of the field of psychoanalytic approaches to film see: Sharon Packer, *Movies and the Modern Psyche* (Westpoint, Praeger 2007); Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1991); Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

reconstructed in its aftermath.¹⁶ Criticising the “ethereal speculations” and “vagaries” of ‘Grand Theory’ (psychoanalysis) Bordwell and Carroll argue that film studies can proceed “sans psychoanalysis”.¹⁷ Although psychoanalytic approaches to film have declined in popularity since their height in the 1970s and 1980s, important works are still being produced that highlight the potential it still holds. For example, Todd McGowan has brought a fresh approach to the issue by moving away from psychoanalytic film theory and back towards psychoanalytic theory itself. McGowan argues that much Lacanian film theory from the 1970s was not Lacanian enough. He demonstrates how a return to different Lacanian texts from the ones that the 1970s theorists drew upon can be seen to provide a fresh insight into cinema and spectatorship.¹⁸ Therefore the application of psychoanalysis to film has had a turbulent history. Yet there is one genre where this approach has dominated and continued to keep a firm foothold: horror.

The horror genre only entered into the film studies agenda in the mid 1970s, at the same time that the dominance of psychoanalysis in theory was reaching its height and beginning to be questioned.¹⁹ In contrast to studies on spectatorship, which looked predominantly to Lacanian theory to understand the relationship between the viewer and the screen, horror cinema theorists instead returned to Freud in order to explore the genre.²⁰ This is not to say that the backlash against psychoanalysis was not felt in horror film studies. In 1993 Steven Shaviro in his book *The Cinematic Body*, for example, which deals largely with the horror genre, claims that the psychoanalytic

¹⁶ David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, eds., *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Bordwell and Carroll, ‘Introduction,’ in *Post-Theory*, xiii-xiv.

¹⁸ McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 1-22.

¹⁹ Christine Gledhill, ‘The Horror Film,’ in: *The Cinema Book*, ed. Pam Cook (London, British Film Institute, 2007), 99.

²⁰ See: Steven Jay Schneider, ed., *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud’s Worst Nightmare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) for a range of essays exploring the application of psychoanalysis to cinema.

model for film studies was “utterly bankrupt” and that it needed to be “discarded altogether”²¹ But overall, even scholars who are predominantly critical of psychoanalytic approaches to film acknowledge that the horror genre appears to have been written in the language of psychoanalysis. Andrew Tudor reports that “the genre itself invokes psychoanalytic considerations”, whilst Carroll admits that “many horror films presuppose, implicitly or explicitly, psychoanalytical concepts and imagery”.²² Further to this, in the West at least, pop-Freudianism and its focus on sexual depravity and unconscious desires directly influenced the narratives of many horror works, with directors explicitly referring to Freudian concepts in their work. Therefore the impact of psychoanalysis, and Freudian psychoanalysis in particular, on horror cinema cannot be ignored.

A potential explanation for the stronghold of psychoanalysis in the field of horror film scholarship could be the figure of the monster. As an embodiment of what is considered horrific by any particular culture, the monster or monstrous element of the film reveals the inner-fears of the society that creates and watches such films. Steve Neale contends that the monster – or monstrous – forms the “generic verisimilitude” of the genre; its presence is what is expected by the audience and marks it as a horror film.²³ Carroll also follows this view, arguing that the portrayal of a monster of either supernatural or extra-terrestrial or scientific origin, and the reaction of other

²¹ Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Although in a later piece Shaviro did admit that his polemical tirade against psychoanalysis could be attacked by the very same critiques that he was levelling against it. See Steven Shaviro, ‘The Cinematic Body REDUX’, *Parallax* 14, no. 1 (2008): 48-54.

²² Andrew Tudor, ‘Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre,’ *Cultural Studies* 11, no.3 (1997), 446. Noël Carroll ‘Afterword: Psychoanalysis and the Horror Film,’ in: *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud’s Worst Nightmare*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 257.

²³ Steve Neale, ‘Questions of Genre,’ in: *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Keith Barry Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 161.

characters to that monster as one of threat and disgust, is what defines the genre.²⁴ Carroll's argument is somewhat limited, as it excludes any films that depict a human killer such as Norman Bates in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) or Leatherface in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974).²⁵ Matt Hills provides a counter to Carroll, by suggesting that instead of looking at individual entities as defining the parameters of horror, it is more fruitful to consider an "event-based" study, looking at the monstrous as well as the monster.²⁶ In another criticism of Carroll, Tudor argues that genres are not fixed, and that they change with their audiences and social situation, so that the "pursuit of a truly universal explanation is misguided".²⁷ He continues by arguing that the definition of monsters and what is considered monstrous changes over time, and that what once was considered horrifying could later on be seen as comedic, ludicrous or camp, so attempts to define the genre, whether philosophical or psychoanalytic, will be misleading. Cosimo Urbano, in a defence of psychoanalytic horror film criticism, argues against both Tudor and Carroll's arguments, writing that "what is essential to the modern horror film is *not* the mere presence of a monster but a set of peculiar and specific feelings that the films elicit in their viewers... a specific spectatorial affect, namely anxiety" and therefore that a definition of the genre is only possible at the site of the spectator.²⁸ Urbano agrees

²⁴ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 1990) and Noël Carroll, 'The Nature of Horror,' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 46 No. 1 (Autumn 1987).

²⁵ See: Cynthia A. Freeland, *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000). Mark Jancovich, *Horror* (London: Batsford, 1992).

²⁶ Matt Hills, 'An Event-Based Definition of Art-Horror,' in: *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, eds. Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2003).

²⁷ Andrew Tudor, 'Why Horror?,' 456.

²⁸ Cosimo Urbano, "'What's the Matter with Melanie?': Reflections on the Merits of Psychoanalytical Approaches to Modern Horror Cinema,' in: *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*, 25.

with Steven Jay Schneider that monsters may change, but it is the experience of monstrosity that remains a constant.²⁹

Arguably the key theory behind this experience of monstrosity in the view of psychoanalytic horror film criticism is the process of repression. In 1979 Richard Lippe and Robin Wood organised a retrospective of American horror cinema at the Toronto International Film Festival titled *The American Nightmare*. The themes of repression and the role of the family in horror cinema that were discussed within this forum and the accompanying publication have had a lasting effect on the study of the genre, notably Wood's own paper 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film' and his theory that the driving force behind horror cinema is the 'return of the repressed': "its re-emergence dramatised, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, the 'happy ending' (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression".³⁰ Wood contends that psychoanalysis can be used politically in the analysis of film if a position is taken that upholds the principle of "examining critically" rather than a simple acceptance or rejection.³¹ Schneider also contends that repression is the key theme that defines the genre of horror. He argues that although psychoanalytic approaches to horror cinema take on varied – and often conflicting – positions they all "depend on the Freudian notion of repressed mental content – anxieties, fears, even fantasies and wishes that get relegated to the unconscious during childhood".³² Even outside of psychoanalysis, film theorist Vivian Sobchack (who is openly critical of the approach) argues that repression is the "dominant strategy of the

²⁹ Steven Jay Schneider, 'Monsters as (Uncanny) Metaphors: Freud, Lakoff, and the Representation of Monstrosity in Cinematic Horror,' in: *Horror Film Reader*, eds. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 2000).

³⁰ Wood, 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film,' 113.

³¹ Robin Wood, 'Foreword: "What Lies Beneath",' in: *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*, xv.

³² Steven Jay Schneider, 'Introduction: Psychoanalysis in/and/of the Horror Film,' in: *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*, 2.

traditional horror film”.³³ The focus on repression ties the horror film to Freudian psychoanalysis. Indeed, just as repression (and the return of the repressed) is often seen as the basic function of the genre, it is also, in Freud’s words, “the corner-stone on which the whole structure of psycho-analysis rests”.³⁴ The importance of the repressed content expressed should not be ignored or dismissed, since what is depicted in these works reveals the structural oppressions and forced repressions that exist covertly within society.

Feminism and Horror: The Return of the Repressed Maternal

The horror genre has attracted much attention from feminist film scholars who have used psychoanalysis to critically examine the representation of women – and the maternal – in horror cinema as a product of patriarchal society. Scholars such as Tania Modleski, Christine Gledhill and Shelly Stamp Lindsey view horror as being overtly misogynistic, not just because of its portrayal of female victims, but also of how aspects of femininity are portrayed as being monstrous.³⁵ In *The Monstrous-Feminine* Creed argues against the characterisation of woman as victim in horror, instead contending that it is the reproductive female body that forms the basis for horror, specifically the abject maternal body.³⁶ Operating within a framework which owes greatly to Julia Kristeva and her text *Powers of Horror*, Creed argues that a woman’s ability to give birth links her to the animal world and to death – what she goes on to

³³ Vivian Sobchack, ‘Bringing It All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange,’ in: *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 144.

³⁴ Freud, ‘On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement,’ (1914) SE XIV, 16.

³⁵ Tania Modleski, ‘The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory,’ in: *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). Gledhill, ‘The Horror Film.’; Shelley Stamp Lindsey, ‘Horror, Femininity, and Carrie’s Monstrous Puberty,’ *The Dread of Difference*, 279-295.

³⁶ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 43-58.

call the 'primal uncanny' in her follow-up work *Phallic Panic*.³⁷ Creed contends that woman's reproductive power stands as a continual reminder to patriarchy of the instability of the Symbolic order. She contends that horror cinema reveals the true source of the male fear of femininity as not that of being castrated – as suggested by Freudian theory – but as castrating, and therefore potentially deadly.

Clover takes a slightly more positive view of the representation of women in American horror cinema. She argues that the subgenre of the slasher film subverts the usual male-monster/female-victim binary as at the end of the film the male monster is usually killed by a 'Final Girl', a victim turned hero, whose traumatic struggle for survival is portrayed ("she is abject terror personified").³⁸ Clover argues that in the slasher film guns are traded for more phallic weapons such as knives, axes and needles, which the 'Final Girl' must then acquire in order to dispatch the (human) monster, effectively phallicising her. Clover argues that the heroine's acquired phallic masculinity allows for cross-gender identification for the male audience as well as simultaneously creating a space for an active female within cinema (albeit a masculinised one).

However, Clover's analysis of the 'Final Girl' has come under scrutiny from gender and queer theorists. Klaus Rieser argues that slasher films are inherently misogynistic and homophobic, firmly keeping the position of the victim equated with the feminine and the monster as being a negative queer figure, ultimately reinforcing the heterosexist matrix.³⁹ Rieser contends that for the 'Final Girl' her journey is not one of initiation into adulthood and success, nor is it one that receives societal approval as she does not 'get the boy' at the end. Instead she remains a victim, often being driven

³⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* [1980], trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, Columbia University Press, 1982); Creed, *Phallic Panic*, vii.

³⁸ Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, 35.

³⁹ Klaus Rieser, 'Masculinity and Monstrosity: Characterization and Identification in the Slasher Film,' *Men and Masculinities* 3 no. 4 (April 2004).

insane or moving on only have to fight the monster once more in the film's sequel. Although she may exhibit masculine traits she is still "deep down" a woman, a woman whose role is to destroy the masculine monster who exhibits too many feminine traits. Rieser concludes that equating femininity with victimhood and positioning non-normative masculinity as monstrous, the slasher genre declares the dangers of non-heteronormative positions. Jack J. Halberstam also argues that Clover's analysis of slasher films re-stabilises gender positions, but instead proposes that the figure of the 'Final Girl' does hold a queer potential. Drawing on Judith Butler's book *Bodies that Matter*, Halberstam argues that it is the way that bodies are made intelligible that binds masculinity and maleness, and femininity and femaleness.⁴⁰ Halberstam writes: "The masculinity of the male is secured through an understanding of his body as 'impenetrable' and as capable of penetrating. Femininity, then, becomes that which can and must be penetrated but which cannot penetrate in return".⁴¹ Consequently, Halberstam contends that bodies that splatter – those belonging to the characters that die – are gendered feminine as they have been penetrated. Female bodies that do not splatter must be considered as being sutured and apart from the traditional gender construction that would equal their death. Halberstam proposes that this is where the true queer potential of the 'Final Girl' lies: this improper gendering of the 'Final Girl' aligns her with the monstrous as she is counter to heteronormative gender assignment, stitching gender traits together in order to defeat her attacker and take control. Therefore the 'Final Girl' becomes a symbol of a queer female adolescent with masculine traits that has positive links to monstrosity as being something outside of the heteronormative structural logic.

⁴⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁴¹ Jack Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (London: Duke University Press), 34.

With a focus on the reception of these films, Cristina Pinedo argues critics like Clover and Creed presuppose a male audience for horror cinema, therefore denying that the genre might hold some pleasure for female viewers.⁴² Pinedo argues that the horror genre is “a mix of contradictory tendencies” allowing for both feminist and anti-feminist readings, and depicting both female agency and patriarchal misogyny.⁴³ Two recent books that have also focused on the female horror audience are Richard Nowell’s *Blood Money*, which argues that producers and distributors of American slasher films actively attempted to attract a female audience, and Short’s *Misfit Sisters*.⁴⁴ Short’s text views horror films as depicting female rites of passage through their links to fairy tales and the maternal. As such she opens the horror genre up to ideas of a positive reception from a female audience. Instead of viewing Clover’s figure of the ‘Final Girl’ as phallicised, Short argues that the teenagers depicted prove themselves to be good mother material and therefore possibly “[let] men off the hook regarding their own responsibilities as both nurturers and protectors within the family”.⁴⁵ Surrounded by apathetic or useless adults, these girls have to fulfil the role of protective parent, ridding the world of a deadly threat.

Arnold draws on the distinction between ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ mothers in her book *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood*. The Good mother acts according to patriarchal law, and puts the needs of her child above her own. The Bad mother on the other hand is the woman who is unable to let go of her children, who metaphorically smothers them and refuses to let them pass through the Oedipal trajectory and enter adulthood and society. Yet Arnold proposes that in horror cinema

⁴² Cristina Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 144 n.4.

⁴³ Pinedo, *Recreational Terror*, 133.

⁴⁴ Richard Nowell, *Blood Money: A History of the First Teen Slasher Film Cycle* (London: Continuum, 2011).

⁴⁵ Short, *Misfit Sisters*, 61

the mother is neither fully villain nor victim: “her maternity seems to situate her as always one step removed from either”.⁴⁶ She contends that the maternal character’s monstrosity is lessened through her need to mother, whether through a perverse form of protecting her child, or avenging their death.

Discussions of the representation of the mother and the maternal extend beyond American horror cinema. Guy Austin, Marc Olivier and Ben McCann all draw connections between the representation of the maternal body in danger in French horror cinema and ‘border horror’: the fear of immigration and the ethnic *other*.⁴⁷ In these works that are examples of the porous membrane between horror and extreme cinema, the pregnant mother’s body becomes a fortress that, like fortress Europe, continually suffers attack. As Olivier writes: “City. Home. Womb... The borders between inside and outside, between the private and the public reveal their vulnerable permeability”.⁴⁸ In a similar manner, Jay McRoy in his work on Japanese horror cinema argues that the contemporary imaging of the *kaidan* (avenging spirit) subgenre represents fears over the changing nature of the family and what this might entail for the country.⁴⁹ The figure of the single-mother in these films embodies the concern over the loss of traditional Japanese values through the decline in extended-family households, and the rising levels of female employment and divorce. Consequently, across international horror and extreme cinema the mother’s body stands as a metaphor for the anxieties about the family, the nation and its borders. The worries and fears of patriarchal societies are played out through her terror, guilt, and pain.

⁴⁶ Arnold, *Maternal Horror Film*, 181.

⁴⁷ Guy Austin, ‘Biological Dystopias: The Body in Contemporary French Horror Cinema’, *L’Esprit Créateur* 52, no.2 (Summer 2012): 99-113; Marc Olivier, ‘Border Horror: A Review of Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury’s *A L’intérieur*’, *Lingua Romana* 6, no. 1, (Fall 2007), <http://linguaromana.byu.edu/olivier6.html>; Ben McCann, ‘Pierced Bodies, Punctured Borders: The Contemporary French Horror Film’, *Australian Journal of French Studies* 45, no.3, (2008): 225-237.

⁴⁸ Olivier, ‘Border Horror’, no pagination.

⁴⁹ Jay McRoy, *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema* (New York: Rodopi, 2008).

The Womb Phantasy in International Horror and Extreme Cinema

In contrast to the existing Anglophone scholarship on the mother in horror cinema, this thesis will analyse films from both Western and Eastern countries, using psychoanalytic theory native to each location. America, France, South Korea and Japan have been chosen for study due to each country's prolific production of horror and extreme films, therefore providing a wealth of material to be used. Further to this, throughout the history of each nation's horror or extreme cinema, clear trends can be seen in specific subgenres or during particular cycles or time periods, of a focus on the maternal, or the featuring of mother-child relationships.⁵⁰ This is not to say that this is not present in other countries, but that the chosen four provided the biggest range of productive examples. This thesis will show how at key moments in time these trends relate to specific societal concerns (notably the position of mothers), bringing together a psychoanalytic approach with one that is also acknowledges the influence of societal beliefs and conditions on cinematic productions. The films chosen for analysis cover a range of representations of motherhood, the maternal, and the womb. Whereas some of the directors studied directly critique the patriarchal oppression of the maternal, other works can be seen to reveal the cultural misogyny that exists (in varying manifestations) across the four countries in question.

I have chosen to analyse works from both the horror genre and extreme cinema, as I believe these two forms of filmmaking are becoming increasingly interlinked. Mattias Frey discusses the difficulty in demarcating the boundaries of extreme cinema as it crosses over into horror, pornography, exploitation and art cinema. Frey proposes that extremity should be considered as a spectrum, as opposed to being defined through an

⁵⁰ It was also necessary to select countries that would provide a body of psychoanalytic research in order for a culturally specific methodology to be possible. However, it is important to note that overall this selection was led by the cinematic examples a country was able to provide, rather than trying to mold films to fit the thesis' focus on the womb and the maternal.

“in or out” definition: “Speaking roughly and simply, extreme cinema is an international production trend of graphically sexual or violent ‘quality’ films that often stoke critical or popular controversy... these productions depend on (offending) culturally inscribed boundaries between art and exploitation”.⁵¹ To limit my analysis to just horror cinema would hinder a thorough exploration of the representation of the mother-child bond, as key works such as Miike Takashi’s *Ôdishon* (*Audition*, 1999) and François Ozon’s *Regarde la mer* (*See the Sea*, 1997) do not fully comply with the conventions of the genre.

I believe that horror and extreme cinema contain the clearest examples of the split created between the mythical maternal and the abject biological mother that is fundamental to my reading of the womb phantasy. These two forms of cinema have been chosen over other genres or styles of filmmaking that are often examined in relation to the maternal, such as the melodrama, due to the links between horror and the unconscious discussed previously in this introduction. I propose that extreme cinema also allows for an experience of repressed mental content in the same manner that horror does, and therefore both forms of filmmaking present the opportunity for a study into the precarious position of the womb as an object of both monstrosity and desire. Throughout this thesis film and psychoanalytic theory will be used in a mutually engaging manner: at times films will be used to illustrate, explore and critique a psychoanalyst’s proposal, whilst at others, psychoanalysis is used to reveal hidden symptoms within the body of a filmic text. I believe that both film and psychoanalysis must be understood as products of a particular society and should not be considered in isolation if the attempt is to understand how they reveal certain

⁵¹ Mattias Frey, *Extreme Cinema: The Transgressive Rhetoric of Today’s Art Film Culture* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 7. It is also important to note that in the case of Asian cinema the label ‘Asia Extreme’ is a marketing term rather than a specific genre, used to package a variety of works containing explicit violence or sexual acts to Western audiences.

aspects of the human psyche, in this case the relationship between a child and his or her mother. Although the structure of the psyche and the existence of the unconscious is taken as universal, its content is not. This thesis will not attempt to prove that all psychoanalytic theory is internationally applicable, but instead to draw out the links between different culturally specific theories to explain the strikingly similar symbolic representations of the womb and the maternal in Eastern and Western cinema. By paying attention to such cultural specificities, psychoanalysis can be used in a manner that limits the formation of a ‘master narrative’. Subsequently, this thesis reads the films in question as cultural products like myths or fairy tales that can be used to reveal unconscious desires from the society in which they were produced.

Due to this culturally specific approach it is important to be aware of the increasingly transnational status of cinema. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden argue the categorising of different ‘national cinemas’ is problematic due to the “dissolution of any stable connection between a film’s place of production and/or setting and the nationality of its makers and performers”.⁵² They contend that at the same time that national borders are becoming increasingly permeable, the growth of the internet and digital technologies mean not only that influences can be drawn from across many cultures, but also that films are often created with an international audience in mind. This argument is supported by Gary G. Xu, who proposes that a number of Asian directors and producers “actively exercise self-censorship” to make their productions more appealing to the American remake market.⁵³

⁵² Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, ‘General Introduction: What is Transnational Cinema’ in *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader* eds. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (London: Routledge, 2006), 1.

⁵³ Gary G. Xu, ‘Remaking East Asia, Outsourcing Hollywood’ in *East Asian Cinemas: Exploring Transnational Connections on Film* eds. Leon Hunt and Leung Wing-Fai (London: IB Tauris, 2008), 196.

However, Ezra and Rowden do contend that equally, nationalism cannot be rejected altogether:

The space of the transnational is not an anarchic free-for-all in which blissfully deracinated subjects revel in ludically mystified states of ahistoricity. The continued force of nationalism, especially nationalism grounded in religious cultures, must be recognised as an emotionally charged component of the construction of narratives of cultural identity that people at all levels of society use to maintain a stable sense of self.⁵⁴

Horror cinema, and also to some extent the horror end of the extreme cinema spectrum, regularly draws on religious themes and symbolism, as well as traditional folk tales and myths. Therefore, as will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, although a number of works that fall into the marketing category ‘Asia Extreme’ can be seen to have been “Hollywoodised” – as Xu puts it – to appeal to an international audience, these films also draw heavily on culturally specific iconography and themes.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the popularity of remaking Asian horror and extreme films for the Western market actually presents an opportunity to demonstrate the similarities in maternal symbolism across the world. As will be addressed in Chapter 5, a comparison of Japanese films with their Hollywood remakes shows how the key womb spaces, and the way they are interacted with within the narrative, are universally understood. These womb symbols found in Asian cinema fit the categories that Freud presented in his dream analysis over one hundred years ago, yet at the same time this thesis will show how they also appear in East Asian myths and folktales.

This thesis is composed of five chapters, the first of which is a comprehensive study of the womb and the womb phantasy across Freud’s work. This thorough exploration reveals the hidden importance of the womb to Freudian theory, and the lasting

⁵⁴ Ezra and Rowden, ‘General Introduction,’ 4.

⁵⁵ Xu, ‘Remaking East Asia,’ 192-193.

shadow that it has therefore cast over psychoanalysis across the globe and from his era onwards. This critical engagement with the founding texts of psychoanalysis lays the groundwork for my hypothesis that the womb phantasy is not about Oedipal sexual desire, but the wish to re-enter the mother-child symbiotic union.

This opening chapter also highlights the importance of engaging critically with Freudian theory and the problematic issues that it brings up regarding femininity, female sexuality and motherhood. This issue is tackled head-on in Chapter 2, where the work of three French psychoanalysts is used to challenge Freud's discussion of the development of the infant's psyche and sexuality. Focusing on the theme of the womb as the site of the origin of life, this chapter opens with a discussion of the construction of femininity. It combines Luce Irigaray's critique of the denial of the active female reproductive body in Freud's work, with the films of Catherine Breillat and her depiction of women subverting the confines of the passive body that patriarchy has created for them. Both Irigaray and Breillat are read as challenging the maternal binary of mythical and biological that is created as a result of mankind needing to assert himself over the womb as the point of origin. Continuing this theme of origins, this chapter then follows the progression of life from conception through to gestation and symbiosis, exploring the split in the maternal in two French horror films that feature pregnant protagonists. Taking issue with Julia Kristeva's theory of the mother's need to make herself abject in order to push her child into the Symbolic, this section shows how a more progressive position is revealed in the figure of the pregnant 'Final Girl', who realigns the mythical and the biological sides of motherhood. This chapter then presents the work of Didier Anzieu in order to counter Kristeva's view that the mother-child bond ends in either maternal abjectivity or psychosis. Through an analysis of the mother-child relationship in François Ozon's

Regarde la mer (*See the Sea*, 1997) it is proposed that Anzieu's theory of the Skin Ego should be seen as a form of womb phantasy, enabling a reading of the split from the symbiotic union that does not have to result in the mother being made monstrous.

Moving on from the focus on origin and gestation, Chapter 3 looks at American horror cinema and the representation of the symbiotic union of mother and child in the first stages of childhood. Challenging Freud's insistence on the relationship between the womb phantasy and the Oedipus complex discussed in Chapter 1, this chapter utilises the work of Margaret Mahler and Nancy Chodorow to propose that the womb phantasy is the first original phantasy of life that signifies the entry of the child into subjective thought. The importance of the role of the mother in the formation of the psyche during the symbiotic union presents a challenge to patriarchal society, a challenge that results in the bond being depicted as monstrous. Exploring the representations of this monstrosity, this chapter first looks at three monstrous mothers in modern American cinema, proposing that they represent the horror of what may happen if the bond with the mother is not broken. It then looks to the haunted house subgenre, which in an equally oppressive manner represents mothers assisting their children in the symbolic breaking free of the symbiotic union, and entering adulthood. This chapter highlights the importance that womb symbolism plays in these narratives, with the womb representing not just a thing of horror, but also a safe space that the child seeks to return to. Finally, this chapter asks whether these misogynistic themes still remain in the twenty-first century, analysing one of the most successful American horror films of the last decade through the lens of Karen Horney's famous 1932 attack on Freud's phallocentrism.

Chapter 4 focuses on the cinema of South Korea, exploring how the Korean veneration of the self-sacrificing and devoted mother creates portrayals of

motherhood that contrast with Western representations of the monstrous maternal. Tracing the theme of abortion and infanticide, this chapter analyses the importance of *mo-jeong* – the bond between mother and child – to Korean culture, proposing that the celebration of this relationship allows women who are non-mothers (those who have been denied the chance to mother) to commit monstrous acts with some level of social sanction. Drawing together this research on *mo-jeong* with the cultural practice of pre-natal education and care, this chapter proposes that the manner in which a Korean woman is encouraged to relate to the child in her womb results in a culturally-specific womb phantasy that forms the foundation of Korean society. With these differences between the Korean and Western representations of the maternal and the womb phantasy in mind, this chapter then completes a detailed reading of the successful film *Janghwa, Hongryeon (A Tale of Two Sisters)*, Kim Jee-woon, 2003), to demonstrate the consistencies in the symbolic use of the womb and the representation of the mother-child bond that appear in the West and in Korea.

Finally, Chapter 5 looks at the legacy of the symbiotic union in later childhood and then on to adulthood. It first analyses the role that womb symbols play in the *kaidan* (avenging ghost) subgenre of Japanese horror cinema, arguing that these works reveal male fears about the changing role of women in Japanese society. Using the work of the psychoanalyst Kitayama Osamu, it pays particular attention to the liminal or transient qualities of the mythical womb space, studying the motifs of repetition, and the loss and rediscovery of maternal love, that are common across these films. This chapter then turns to the work of Japan's most well known psychoanalyst Doi Takeo and one of its most prolific and notorious directors, Miike Takashi, to propose that the country's cultural trait of *amae* – the desire to be able to depend on those around you – can be read as a form of womb phantasy.

The films analysed in this thesis all demonstrate how even when female or maternal characters are depicted in a monstrous or misogynistic manner, there still remains a number of repeated symbols and themes that represent maternal love and the love for the mother. I propose that these form a constant reminder of the mother's womb. They act as symptoms – in the Žižekian sense – of patriarchal repression, revealing the unconscious love for the mother and the awe at her life-giving and nurturing abilities. These spaces and symbols depict this struggle between repression and desire in a clearer light, away from the oppression of society. Existing on the level of both the symbolic and the unconscious, their consistency across these international narratives reveals the importance and endurance of the desire that they represent, the desire to return to the mother-child union that is symbolised by the womb.

Chapter 1

The Womb Phantasy: Freud's Repressed Maternal Legacy

This chapter will explore the position of the womb and the womb phantasy in Freudian theory. Through a close critical engagement with a number of Freud's key texts, case studies and concepts, I will propose that the womb phantasy plays a key role in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, even though the wish to return to the maternal womb remains repeatedly unacknowledged, overlooked or dismissed by Freud himself. Opening with a thorough investigation into the appearance of the womb in Freud's work, this chapter will then examine a number of key topics – the Oedipus complex, the primal phantasies, the uncanny and the death drive – to argue for the critical role that the womb phantasy plays in Freudian psychoanalysis. This analysis will enable the four chapters that follow to demonstrate the importance of the womb to horror cinema, and how such films assist the proposition that the womb phantasy is not about Oedipal desire, but the wish to return to the safety and love of the symbiotic union with the mother.

The Womb Phantasy

Over the duration of his career Freud continually skirted around the subject of the womb phantasy. He often gestured towards its importance, but then backed off without ever fully plumbing the depths of its role in the psyche. For this reason, presence of the womb lies always just under the surface of many of his key texts, never truly being revealed and fully engaged with, yet present nonetheless. As with the horror and extreme films studied in this thesis, the desire to return to the maternal womb is a motif in Freud's work that is never fully repressed, and always seeks release.

Freud associates the maternal womb with four interlinked themes: sleep, safety, birth and sex. In relation to the act of sleep he proposes that the womb represents comfort and safety. In 'A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams' Freud comments that: "Somatically sleep is a reactivation of intrauterine existence, fulfilling as it does the conditions of repose, warmth and exclusion of stimulus; indeed, in sleep many people resume the foetal posture."¹ This idea obviously captured Freud's imagination as during the same period he argued in one of his lectures on dreams that the manner in which humans choose to sleep enacts a return to the womb:

Our relation to the world, into which we have come so unwillingly, seems to involve our not being able to tolerate it uninterruptedly. Thus from time to time we withdraw into a premundane state, into existence in the womb. At any rate, we arrange conditions for ourselves very like what they were then: warm, dark and free from stimuli. Some of us roll ourselves up into a tight package and, so as to sleep, take up a posture much as it was in the womb. The world, it seems, does not possess even those of us who are adults completely, but only up to two thirds; one third of us is still quite unborn. Every time we wake up in the morning it is like a new birth.²

Freud's style and wording here represents a pattern seen across his discussion of the womb, where he utilises a philosophical tone and poetic license. In such discussions, the womb is not presented as an actual biological organ, but instead as a mythic space that exists more in the mind than body. Despite his unwillingness to fully explore the importance of this mythical womb, these moments do point towards an undercurrent in Freud's work that the desire to return to the mother's body is the first human wish. By emphasising its mythical nature, Freud is able to separate the womb from what is elsewhere regarded as a castrated and monstrous female form. Yet simultaneously, this also appears to separate it from the figure of the mother too. She only exists in the background as an ethereal presence, rather than a living being that actually enables

¹ Freud, 'A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams' (1917 [1915]), SE XIV, 222.

² Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916-1917 [1915-1917]), SE XV, 88.

the security that the womb is seen to represent. It is this splitting away of a mythical idea or ideal of the maternal (that is symbolised by the womb) from the biological body of the mother, that I propose also operates in the subjugation of women throughout patriarchal societies, and can be seen in cultural products such as horror cinema. This divide and its effects will be one of the key points of study throughout this thesis.

The idea of safety and comfort that Freud believed is first experienced in the womb – or projected back onto that time – can also be seen in the psychoanalyst's comparison between the womb and the home (or homeland). In *Civilisation and its Discontents* he argues that the house is a “substitute for the mother's womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease”.³ This link between safety, the home and the womb is also seen in his discussion of agoraphobia, where Freud argues that sufferers undergo a regression back to childhood, or in extreme cases, back to the mother's womb, as a means to return to the safety of the mother-child dyad.⁴ In ‘The Uncanny’ Freud refers to the womb as “the former Heim [home] of all human beings”, and suggests that dreams of a location or country where the subject feels they have visited before should be interpreted as dreams of the womb.⁵

This link between the home and the womb can be seen in Freud's analysis of dream symbolism. He contends that houses with balconies or projections, or that are entered into, represent the female body, in contrast to buildings with smooth exteriors that are regarded to be symbolic of the male physique.⁶ Rooms too, therefore, through their nature of being something internal that is entered, are also symbols of the female

³ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930 [1929]), SE XXI, 91.

⁴ Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926), SE XX, 127.

⁵ Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ (1919), SE XVII, 245.

⁶ Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 153; Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), SE IV & V, 397.

body, and in many cases in Freud's research, the womb in particular.⁷ In his lecture on dream symbolism he writes:

The female genitals are symbolically represented by all such objects as share their characteristic of enclosing a hollow space which can take something into itself: by *pits*, *cavities* and *hollows*, for instance, by *vessels* and *bottles*, by *receptacles*, *boxes*, *trunks*, *cases*, *chests*, *pockets*, and so on. *Ships*, too, fall into this category. Some symbols have more connection with the uterus than with the female genitals: thus, cupboards, stoves, and, more especially, rooms. Here room-symbolism touches on house-symbolism.⁸

Therefore, the items that Freud views as symbolic of the female genitals and womb are varied in type, but share physical characteristics. It is the hollowness of the object – its ability to be both exterior and interior – and to be entered by something or someone, which appears to make it symbolic of the female sexual organs.

Another key symbol of the maternal womb in Freud's work is water, although in the manner that Freud always gestures towards womb phantasies before dismissing them, he often analyses dreams that contain water as birth dreams rather than as depicting the desire to return to the womb. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud writes:

A large number of dreams, often accompanied by anxiety and having as their content such subjects as passing through narrow spaces or being in water, are based upon phantasies of intra-uterine life, of existence in the womb and of the act of birth.⁹

For example, he records the dream of a young woman who dived into a lake where the reflection of the moon hit the water.¹⁰ Even though the shape of the lake and its contents mirror Freud's previous comments about womb symbolism, Freud argues that the woman's entry into the water should be reversed, and that this is actually a dream about birth. He does suggest that the dream may reflect the patient's wish to become a mother herself, but does not explore the possibility that this dive represents

⁷ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 354.

⁸ Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 156.

⁹ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 399.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 400.

a return to her own mother, which could also be explained as an identification with her before embarking on parenthood. As Neil Maizels comments: “Freud did not allow for the possibility that the dream contains a wish to dive into the womb... he was reluctant to acknowledge the desire to enter the womb, as a possible phantasy in *itself*”.¹¹ Freud argues that the understanding of water as a symbol of birth has evolutionary roots, as all mammals evolve from creatures that originally lived in water, and first come into existence in the water-like fluid of the maternal womb.¹² But instead of exploring how dreams containing water and containers might be representative of a desire to re-join the mother, Freud only appears to look at them as a separation from her through birth.

A potential reason for Freud’s refusal to acknowledge the role of the womb phantasy as a desire to return to the womb to re-join the mother could be his insistence that such phantasies are tied to Oedipal desire. Freud rarely even uses the term ‘womb phantasy’, and when he does, it is usually to describe the repressed desire to have sex with either the mother or father as part of a positive or negative Oedipus complex. Freud argued that those with womb phantasies unconsciously wish to be inside the mother’s womb so that they may take her place during intercourse, thus consummating their relationship with their father.¹³ Alternatively, he proposes that the womb phantasy may allow for a substitution of the self for a penis, so that sex with the mother can be achieved. It is this incestuous reading that is important for Freud. Whereas he frequently equates womb symbolism with birth and safety, in the case of womb phantasies he is keen to emphasise their sexual nature. I propose that the reason why Freud was so keen to stress the relationship between Oedipal desire and womb

¹¹ Neil Maizels, ‘Self-Envy, the Womb and the Nature of Goodness: A Reappraisal of the Death Instinct,’ *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 66 (1985): 186.

¹² Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 160.

¹³ Freud, ‘From the History of an Infantile Neurosis’ (1918 [1914]), SE XVII, 100-103.

phantasies was due to the role that the womb, and his own feelings towards his mother, played in the construction of his master-theory.

Freud's Cupboard and the Birth of the Oedipus Complex

On October 15, 1897 Freud wrote a letter to Wilhelm Fliess outlining the discovery of the process of psychic and sexual maturation that would go on to be a defining feature of his work: the Oedipus complex.¹⁴ The three months leading up to this 'discovery' had been both distressing and insightful for Freud. He was undergoing a period of self-analysis, which was beginning to reveal deeper secrets from his own unconscious. Supported by the analysis of the few patients he was treating at the time, the insights gained during this period caused him to reject his previous work on the seduction theory (a real or phantasy sexual interaction between child and adult) and follow a new path, unearthing the importance of the earliest childhood experiences that would feature so prominently in his psychoanalytic work in the years to come.

In the preceding letter dated October 3-4, Freud recounts to Fliess a memory of travelling on a train with his mother when he was between two and two-and-a-half years old.¹⁵ Mother and son spent the night together, and the young Freud had the opportunity to see her naked. In this letter he also speaks about his childhood nanny, a highly religious Czech woman to whom he developed an erotic attachment, and of whom he was very fond. Freud then records a dream that he had that night. He dreamt about his "teacher in sexual matters" (the nanny) who made him wash in a bath of her used water that was red with her menstrual blood.¹⁶ In the next letter dated October 15, Freud details to Fliess his now greater understanding of the dream. His mother had informed him that whilst she was looking after the newly born Anna (Freud's

¹⁴ Freud, 'Extracts from the Fliess Papers' (1950 [1892-1899]), SE I, 263-266.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 261-263.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

sister), his nanny had been arrested for stealing from the family. It was Freud's half-brother Philipp who had reported the theft. Freud then tells Fliess about a memory that had reappeared to him throughout his life, but that he is now able to understand. In this memory the young Freud is looking for his mother, and Philipp is holding open a cupboard door for him so that he can look inside. Then his mother would walk into the room "looking slim and beautiful".¹⁷ Freud explains that through his self-analysis he now understands that he must have feared that his mother had gone missing like his beloved nanny. He writes that he must have heard his brother saying that the nanny had been '*eingekastelt*' (put in a cupboard), a euphemism for being sent to prison. Freud explains that he (as a young boy) must have missed his mother when she went out and presumed that her disappearance was the same as his nurse's. He decided that Philipp – who had been influential in the arrest of his nurse – must have locked his mother in the cupboard as well.

It is at this point directly after recalling this memory of the cupboard that Freud makes the following statement to his friend:

One single thought of general value has been revealed to me. I have found, in my own case too, falling in love with the mother and jealousy of the father, and I now regard it as a universal event of early childhood... If that is so, we can understand the riveting power of *Oedipus Rex*... the Greek legend seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he feels its existence within himself. Each member of the audience was once, in germ and in phantasy, just such an Oedipus, and each one recoils in horror from the dream-fulfilment here transplanted into reality, with the whole quota of repression which separates his infantile state from his present one.¹⁸

Through the memory of the cupboard scene, and the self-analysis directly preceding it, Freud had been able to bring together his new theory of the jealousy of the father and the freshly revealed desire for the mother under the myth of Oedipus Rex. This is

¹⁷ Freud, 'Extracts from the Fliess Papers,' 264.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 265.

one of the most critical moments for psychoanalysis in its history: the birth of a concept that was to be constantly developed throughout Freud's life and after his death by those who followed him. Juan-David Nasio even goes to the extent to argue that the Oedipus complex is "psychoanalysis itself":

[A]ll of psychoanalysis and the psychoanalytical corpus, all of its concepts without exception, repression, sublimation, drive, desire, all these words that are part of the territory of psychoanalysis revolve around the idea that a three-year-old child desires to have physical pleasure with its parents.¹⁹

But the driving force behind this revelation has been lost in the discoveries of its aftermath. The key to the unearthing of Oedipal desire from the depths of Freud's own unconscious was a womb phantasy.

It was not until writing *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* that Freud was fully able to decode the combination of the memories and dreams recounted in these letters to Fliess. In his chapter on screen memories Freud explores the process by which the earliest childhood memories are repressed and screened over in later life.²⁰ Discussing the nature of how only banal and seemingly unimportant childhood memories are accessible to the conscious mind, Freud questions why and how the traces of the more important and/or distressing events of childhood are repressed. He contends that these 'indifferent' and inconsequential memories act as screens – an act of displacement – for the more important content that threatens the stability of the psyche, such as childhood sexuality or traumatic experiences. Subsequently these screen memories can be seen as later unconscious revisions of the real memory traces.²¹ In this piece Freud argues that the memory of his mother walking into the room looking slim and beautiful has a 'plastic' quality to it, akin to a screen memory, which are visual in

¹⁹ Juan-David Nasio, *Oedipus: The Most Crucial Concept in Psychoanalysis* [2005] trans. David Pettigrew and François Raffoul (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), xiii.

²⁰ This is a topic he first discusses in depth in 1899: Freud, 'Screen Memories' (1899), SE III, 303-322.

²¹ Freud continues this argument and compares childhood memories to myths in: Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* (1910), SE XI, 59-138.

nature due to the likelihood of their being to some extent a fabricated construction. Freud contends that the importance of the slender figure of his mother must have been due to the recent birth of his sister. He explains that at this young age he knew where babies came from, just not how they got there. Speaking in the third person Freud writes: “he was very far from approving of this addition to the family, and was full of mistrust and anxiety that his mother’s insides might conceal still more children”.²² Consequently Freud argues that the cupboard in his dream stood for the mother’s womb, and his half-brother who in Freud’s words “had taken his father’s place as the child’s rival” was blamed for the two incidents: the loss of the nurse and the introduction of the baby.²³

What transforms this memory into a womb phantasy is Freud’s disavowal of his mother’s actual ability to give birth by transferring her untrustworthy biological womb to the cupboard. The young Freud’s phantasy that the babies were hidden in the piece of furniture meant that his mother could remain an idealised and idolised figure because she did not produce the child-rivals herself. He could then contend that he was the only one to have come from her true maternal womb and would forever then be the favourite. The young boy wanted to remain the all and everything of his mother’s world, locked in a symbiotic relationship with her. Freud does not discuss this memory in these terms himself. Instead the jealousy of his siblings, including Philipp, is transformed into a sexual – rather than emotional – desire for the mother, entailing that the womb phantasy is sexualised too and becomes just a means to an end (sex with the mother), rather than an end in itself (reunification with the mother). This is the start of the negation of the emotional desire to return to the symbiotic pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother that continues throughout the rest of Freud’s

²² Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), SE VI, 51 n. 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 51 n. 2.

work, a negation that causes the constant repression of the power of the womb, and the desire to return to the mother's loving embrace.

The Womb and Oedipal Desire

Freud argued that no one could escape the Oedipus complex, as he saw it as the process by which humans became civilised (heterosexual) adults.²⁴ In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud writes that incestuous desires are “essentially an *infantile* feature” and that the first object choices for the love of a young boy are his mother and his sister.²⁵ Freud contends that there is no such thing as an innate aversion to incest, instead he argues: “the earliest sexual excitations of youthful human beings are invariably of an incestuous character and... such impulses when repressed play a part that can scarcely be over-estimated as motive forces of neuroses in later life”.²⁶

Freud argues that the Oedipus complex can be both positive and negative. In the case of young boys the usual positive Oedipus complex begins with the child developing an object-cathexis for the mother. Between the ages of three and five this desire takes on a more sexual nature as he discovers masturbation. The boy wants the mother all to himself so that he may have her undivided attention and continue to receive pleasure from her. The father becomes his rival for his mother's affections and the boy starts to hate him. The boy then begins to fear the father, believing that he may take away his instrument of pleasure – the penis – as punishment for his incestuous desires for his mother and hateful feelings towards his father. Alternatively, a negative Oedipus complex, for Freud, is when the child desires the parent of the same sex. In this scenario the boy desires his father and therefore

²⁴ As will be explored in chapters 4 and 5, the universal application of the Oedipus complex and its culturally different permutations has been widely discussed by East Asian psychoanalytic scholars.

²⁵ Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (1913 [1912-1913]), SE XIII, 17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

identifies with his mother so that he can aim to take her place in the marital relationship. It is not that the boy knows the full nature of intercourse; rather, he understands that pleasure can be gained through stimulation of his genitals. Freud states that during this time the young boy will also witness his mother's genitalia. Realising that she is lacking the adored member, the boy assumes that she has been castrated by the father. If he is experiencing a positive Oedipus complex he will fear that his father may castrate him as punishment for his incestuous desires for his mother. Alternatively if he desires his father he will presume that castration is a necessity in order to replace the mother and have sex with the father. Either way, this entails the loss of his penis. As Freud writes in 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex':

If the satisfaction of love in the field of the Oedipus complex is to cost the child his penis, a conflict is bound to arise between his narcissistic interest in that part of his body and the libidinal cathexis of his parental objects. In this conflict the first of these forces normally triumphs: the child's ego turns away from the Oedipus complex.²⁷

Freud argues that this 'turning away' is more than just repression. Instead he proposes that if carried out correctly, it is the total destruction of these impulses. Freud contends that the boy exchanges the desire for an incestuous union with either parent for an identification with the father. In Freud's view it is this identification that allows the authority of the father to be absorbed by the boy's ego, beginning the formation of the super-ego, which will ultimately replace the father in the prohibition of incest. The final stage of the boy's sexual development is completed at puberty. During this period the boy must detach himself from his parents and make new object choices. Freud believed that these are heavily influenced by the child's earlier experiences

²⁷ Freud, 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' (1924), SE XIX, 176.

during the Oedipus complex, and if worked through in what Freud views as the correct way, they will allow the child to take their place in society free from neuroses.

Although Freud believed that girls also begin by desiring their mothers, he argued that they must take two extra steps in order to go through the positive Oedipus complex. Like boys, he proposed that the Oedipus complex in girls begins with desiring the mother. The young girl enjoys the stimulation of her clitoris in the same manner that a boy might pleasure himself with his penis. Freud argues that she believes her clitoris to be lacking compared to the male member, and begins to see herself as castrated and envies those who have a penis. He writes that her envy of the penis encourages her to suppress her sexual desire and reject clitoral stimulation, entailing that her primary erotogenic zone shifts to the vagina. He believes that this abandonment of masturbation leads the girl into a period of sexual passivity and encourages her to turn away from the mother who does not have a penis (and has possibly denied the girl one too), to the father who possesses one. With this desire for the father Freud contends that the girl has now entered the Oedipus complex proper: this desire for a penis is transformed into a desire for a child (a son), given by the father, so that she may possess the phallus through them. So whereas for boys the castration complex causes the end of the Oedipus complex, for girls it sparks the beginning. Further to this, Freud believed that a girl's original desire for her mother leaves "lasting fixations" and this, combined with the lack of castration fear that is so strong in boys, means that women are never able to fully escape the experience of the Oedipus complex:

Girls remain in [the Oedipus complex] for an indeterminate length of time; they demolish it late and, even so, incompletely. In these circumstances the formation of the super-ego must suffer; it cannot attain the strength and independence which gives it its cultural significance, and

feminists are not pleased when we point out to them the effects of this factor on the average female character.²⁸

It should be unsurprising that such comments have received intense criticism from feminist scholars, even during Freud's lifetime, and these critiques will be engaged with throughout this thesis. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, Karen Horney objected to the weight that Freud placed on penis envy during the development of female sexuality, arguing instead that boys suffer a narcissistic wound due to the fear that their penis is too small for their mother's vagina.²⁹ Likewise, Luce Irigaray challenges Freud's theory of the development of female sexuality as being built around the penis, always as a reaction or counteraction to fit in with the development of male sexuality (see Chapter 2 for a further discussion of her critique).³⁰ Nicholas Rand argues that Freud's insistence on the Oedipus complex as a master thesis entailed that all his work must support it. Rand contends that this centrality of the complex meant that it turned into a 'conceptual prison' for Freud: "In essence, Freud faced an untenable choice: give up the Oedipus complex as the universal nucleus of mental processes or fit new data into its prefabricated mold".³¹ Rand suggests that Freud's discussion of femininity is hampered by such a need, but that the outrage it caused did not bother Freud, as he was more concerned with the bolstering of the Oedipus complex than the actual examination of femininity.

Madelon Sprengnether critiques Freud's conception of the Oedipus complex for the manner in which it refuses the power of the mother. She argues that in Freud's theory

²⁸ Freud, 'Femininity,' in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933 [1932]) SE XXII, 129.

²⁹ Karen Horney, 'The Dread of Woman,' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 13 (1932), 348-360.

³⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* [1974], trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

³¹ Nicholas Rand, 'Did Women Threaten the Oedipus Complex between 1922 and 1933?,' *Angelaki* 9, no. 1 (2004): 53.

the mother is positioned as an object rather than a subject, with no real autonomy or influence on the Oedipal process through which her child is moving. She writes:

While avoiding direct confrontation with issues of maternal power (seduction, aggression, betrayal) Freud idealizes the mother's devotion to her child, at the same time that he conceives of her as castrated and hence inferior or worthy of masculine contempt. Both strategies seem designed to obscure her relative strength and importance vis-à-vis that of an infant.³²

Sprengnether's argument aligns with the one put forward across this thesis of the split created in patriarchy between the mythical maternal and the biological body of the mother, a split that in her view, continually threatens to destabilise Freud's phallogentric story.

The Oedipus complex has also come under fire from queer and gender theorists, notably Judith Butler. In her book *Gender Trouble* Butler challenges Freud's theory of gender 'dispositions', arguing that the Oedipus complex is more concerned with the suppression of homosexuality than incest. Butler challenges Freud's conception of a primary bisexuality in all children, as she contends that his view is still based on heteronormative assumptions. She argues: "The conceptualization of bisexuality in terms of *dispositions*, feminine and masculine, which have heterosexual aims as their intentional correlates, suggests that for Freud *bisexuality is the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche*."³³ Butler argues that the homosexual taboo must precede the heterosexual taboo, in order to pave the way for the heteronormative positions needed for the Oedipal passage: "[h]ence, the dispositions that Freud assumed to be primary or constitutive facts of sexual life are effects of a law which, internalized, produces and regulates discrete gender identity and

³² Madelon Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 3.

³³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), 77.

heterosexuality.”³⁴ However, the main critique of the Oedipus complex that is crucial to this thesis, is the challenge against Freud’s insistence on the sexual nature of the child’s relationship with his or her parents, and the subsequent need (in Freud’s view) to reject the mother. Erich Fromm refuses the sexual nature of the Oedipus complex and instead argues that it is the bond between mother (or mothering-person) and child that is of paramount importance:

This ‘incestuous’ striving, in the pre-genital sense, is one of the most fundamental passions in men or women, comprising the human being’s desire for protection, the satisfaction of his narcissism; his craving to be freed from the risks of responsibility, of freedom, of awareness; his longing for unconditional love, which is offered without any expectation of his loving response.³⁵

Fromm argues that people crave certainty in a world where anything can happen, and this makes them yearn for the simplicity of a mother’s love.

Reconsidering the womb phantasy as the want for love and attention as opposed to the satisfaction of a sexual wish allows for a critique of Freud’s heterosexist Oedipus complex. This desired period of the mother-child dyad is one that is ‘pre-genital’, existing prior to – and outside of – sexuality. The infant in the symbiotic union has no concept of sexual difference or sexual desire. Instead it only experiences needs and satisfactions, such hunger, thirst and comfort. As will be argued using the psychoanalytic and cinematic research presented in this thesis, when this period is wished for in later adult life as a womb phantasy it is not due to Oedipal sexual desire, as Freud argued, but a narcissistic wish to experience love, dedication, and the satisfaction of all needs. Therefore, this new understanding of the womb phantasy is not tied to the gender or sexuality of the subject, and it could even be proposed that the object of the phantasy need not be the mother but could be the primary care giver.

³⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 82.

³⁵ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil* (Riverdale: American Mental Health Foundation, 1964), 93.

As this role is almost entirely dominated by women, the cultural influences that shape the psyche may still inflect the adult phantasy of symbiosis with the symbolism of the womb, even though that initial period may not have been one that existed between a mother and biological child, such as in cases of adoption or the father being the primary care giver. Horror cinema acts as a clear example of this cultural influencing of the psyche. This tie with the mother can also be one tinged with fear, as Fromm argues that the desire to return to the womb involves a loss of independence and the sense of self, as one is ‘devoured’ by the mother. However, I propose that this more negative understanding of the symbiotic union is actually a fear of patriarchal society of the power of the maternal, rather than a symptom of the womb phantasy itself. If there is seen to be a desire for the mother that does not sexualise her, that does not subjugate her, but instead celebrates her and positions her as the origin of both body and psyche (as will be discussed at length in Chapter 2), then this threatens the stability of paternal law. Therefore patriarchy must reject the symbiotic union, and make those under its power view the early mother-child dyad as dangerous, and even potentially deadly.

It is these themes of the primary love for the mother, the enduring pull of the symbiotic bond, and the fear that arises from this pull that are the key points of engagement with psychoanalytic theory that this thesis will utilise in its analysis of horror cinema. My project is not to separate the sexual from the Oedipal, but the Oedipal from the womb phantasy. By doing so it will present a case that womb phantasies actually represent a desire to return to the symbiotic relationship with the mother, not the actual womb itself. In order to achieve this it is important to understand the manner in which Freud suppressed the appearance of the womb in his theories, and this is seen most clearly in his work on the primal phantasies.

The Womb Phantasy and the Search for Origins: Freud and the Wolf-Man

It is in Freud's discussion of the primal phantasies that the womb phantasy is swept up and overshadowed by the phallus-dominated theories of the primal scene and castration. Freud argues that these first phantasies – castration, the primal scene, seduction and intra-uterine life – exist universally, regardless of sex or experience, as they are phylogenetically inherited. As Laplanche and Pontalis note, these four primal phantasies are all to do with origins: "Like collective myths, they claim to provide a representation of and a 'solution' to whatever constitutes a major enigma for the child."³⁶ In the case of seduction phantasies it is the origin of sexuality that is discovered; with castration the origin of sexual difference; with the primal scene it is the origin of the subject; and finally with the womb phantasy it is intrauterine life. Of these four phantasies, the two that are phallically coded (i.e. specifically relating to the actual penis or the power of the phallus) have dominated the discourse: castration and the primal scene. The primal scene is a clear example of Freud's master thesis of the phallus covering over any potential reference to the womb. Freud contends that the primal scene is the search for origins, not the womb phantasy. This witnessed act may not have been understood at the time, but is given its power retroactively, a power that is bound to violence and the superiority of the male genitals.

Freud's only extended analysis of womb phantasies takes place in his case study of the Wolf-Man, a piece of work intended to expose the importance of the primal scene. 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis' records the case of Sergueï Constantinovitch Pankejeff, and James Strachey argues that it is the "most elaborate and no doubt most important of all Freud's case histories".³⁷ Instead of publishing the

³⁶ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* [1967] trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1973), 332.

³⁷ James Strachey, 'Introduction,' in Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,' 3. Strachey argues that the discoveries that Freud made in this case can be seen as influencing many of his later

notes that dealt with the neurosis in its adult form, Freud used the case to attempt to provide evidence for the existence of infantile sexuality and refute the claims that were being made by Jung and Adler against it.

Key to this case study is Constantinovitch's now famous dream. As a young boy he had dreamt that he was lying in bed at night facing a window that looked over a row of trees. The window opened suddenly and he saw six or seven large white wolves sitting in the tree in front of the window. Each wolf had a big fluffy tale and pricked up ears. The patient recalls how as a result of the terror of this vision "evidently of being eaten up by the wolves", he screamed and woke up, although the feeling that the dream was real lasted for an extended period and was difficult to shift.³⁸ He explained to Freud that the reason the wolves were in the tree could be due to a story he was told by his grandfather about a wolf that broke into the workshop of a tailor. The tailor caught the wolf by the tail and pulled it off. In his extended analysis of the dream Freud argues that the big bushy tails of the wolves were a compensation for the docked tail of the wolf in the story, and implied a fear of castration. Constantinovitch recalled how there were two aspects of the manifest content of the dream that stood out to him, that of *attentive looking* (of the dreamer) and *motionlessness* (of the wolves). As this dream occurred at the age of four, Freud argues that whatever event that took place and caused the latent dream content to be formed must have occurred very early on in the patient's life. "*A real occurrence*" summarises Freud, "*dating from a very early period – looking – immobility – sexual problems – castration – his father – something terrible*": the primal scene.³⁹

works including *Totem and Taboo*; *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), SE XIV, 237-258; 'Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety' (1926); 'Repression' (1915), SE XIV, 141-158; and even one of his last papers 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' (1937), SE XXII, 209-254.

³⁸ Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,' 29.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

Freud concludes that as a young child his patient must have witnessed his parents having sex, with his mother being penetrated from behind revealing her lack of a penis. Freud does not believe that the child would have implicitly understood the nature of this event at such a young age; instead at the age of four when the dream occurred the patient was able to return to the memory and imbue it with the knowledge and theories he had gained over the years of his childhood. Freud contends that this remembered image, distorted by the dream work, reminded the boy of the wound that his nanny had warned him about if he touched his penis, and encouraged him to think that the loss of his penis was a necessity of sex with his father. Freud argued that the child's narcissistic genital libido caused him to then repress his passive erotic desire for this father in an attempt to save his treasured organ. However, as Freud argued on many occasions, that which is repressed seeks to return. Through his original passive sexual aim and the great fear caused by his conviction of castration, the boy was identifying with his mother. It was she whom he wished to replace in order to receive sexual pleasure from his father, a wish that was repressed only to return – as repressed wishes do – in the form of a phantasy.

By the time that Constantinovitch first came to Freud as an adult seeking help, his neurosis had become so debilitating that he could no longer work and had to travel everywhere with an assistant and a personal physician. As Freud recalls, the patient's main complaint was the following:

[F]or him the world was hidden in a veil, or that he was cut off from the world by a veil. This veil was torn only at one moment – when, after an enema, the contents of the bowel left his intestinal canal; and then he felt well and normal again.⁴⁰

Freud argues that through his psychologically created abdominal and excretory issues the patient was unconsciously aligning himself with his mother, whose life was also

⁴⁰ Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,' 75.

dominated by a similar incapacity. The patient attempted to unconsciously repudiate this identification through a fear of having blood in his stool, and the theory that it was his father's actions in the witnessed primal scene that made his mother unwell.

Freud explains how as the analysis developed the patient began to believe that as a child he had interrupted his parents during the primal scene by passing a stool. He argues that whether this did in fact happen or if it is a later construction by Constantinovitch is irrelevant as the patient's anal eroticism was key to his neurosis both in childhood and also in his current state. Freud argues that through this bowel movement the child was aligning himself with his mother and producing a stool-baby for his father. In his later life as his neurosis developed once more the patient became unable to pass a stool unless he had been given an enema. This enema had to have been carried out by a man (or later by himself). Once this had been achieved the patient felt as if the veil that hid the world from him had been removed and he was cured for a short period. Freud discovered that the patient had been born in a caul, and that he had believed that this 'lucky hood' would give him a happy and healthy life. This belief was shattered after his gonorrhoeal infection, which greatly injured his narcissism and in his view was tantamount to castration.

Freud argued that the idea of the veil represented a phantasy of returning to the womb:

Thus the caul was the veil which hid him from the world and hid the world from him. The complaint that he made was in reality a fulfilled wishful phantasy: it exhibited him as back once more in the womb, and was, in fact, a wishful phantasy of flight from the world. It can only be translated as follows: 'Life makes me so unhappy! I must get back into the womb!'⁴¹

Therefore the stool that he had passed allowing the veil to be torn away represented the patient's phantasy of re-birth, the ability to be re-born into a new and happy life.

⁴¹ Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,' 100.

However his necessity of having a man carry out the enema meant that Constantinovitch was identifying with his mother, repeating the sexual act that he had witnessed in the primal scene and producing an excrement-baby for his father. This excrement-child stood not only for the patient's own re-birth, but also sexual satisfaction from his father and identification with his mother through a passive sexual position. Freud believed that the phantasy of re-birth was simply a censored version of his repressed homosexual desires through a re-enactment of the primal scene where as a child he also produced a stool. Even though he had repressed the memory of the primal scene it had shaped his adult life, sexual desires and neuroses. The veil that was torn away after every enema was analogous to the opening of his eyes as a child and witnessing the reality of sex with his father. According to Freud, the desire to be back in the womb in this case stood for the desire to take the mother's place in the marital bed, a desire that must be oppressed due to his fear of the castrating father.

Freud's use of the case of the Wolf-Man to shore up his theories of Oedipal desire and the father as the threatening castrator has come under scrutiny from queer theorists, and their contributions can be used to further the discussion of the womb phantasy. Lee Edelman enters into a dialogue with the psychoanalytic therapeutic process that is so integral to this case study through his concept of '(be)hindsight', a queer intervention into *Nachtraglichkeit*. Edelman highlights the suppressed homoerotic content of both the Wolf-Man's vision of his parents engaged in sex from behind (a homosexual penetration), and Freud's own analysis of that scene. He argues that if one were to follow Freud's theory of childhood sexual development, the infant witnessing the act of the primal scene is still at the point of believing that sexual penetration is received anally between two people who do not yet have assigned

gender roles, and that therefore it is always an act of sodomy that presupposes “a sort of proto-homosexuality”.⁴² Edelman contends that the Wolf-Man’s sexual experience centred on his aligning penetration (being penetrated and penetrating) with pleasure, and allowing for a double identification with the mother *and* father, as both were non-gendered beings. However, the analysis of his later dream of the wolves rewrote this double position through the threat of the loss of his penis. “The law of castration,” writes Edelman, “by insisting on the subject’s interpellation as male or female, mandates the loss or repression of specific identifications in order to achieve the singularity of a ‘properly’ sexed and gendered identity”.⁴³ Although Edelman’s argument does push the figure of the mother into the background, obscuring her behind a homosexual relationship between two males, it does highlight Freud’s own inconsistencies when discussing the importance of the primal scene. He proposed that it is the search for the origin of the subject, yet this can only ever occur through looking back, and projecting knowledge gleaned later in life onto a vision that would have had a very different effect at the time it was experienced. Freud appears to tangle himself into knots in order to transform a non-gender specific sexual vision into one that conforms to his father-centred theories of Oedipal desire and the castration complex.

Leo Bersani also explores the inconsistencies in Freud’s analysis of the Wolf-Man’s homoerotic desires. He highlights how Constantinovitch’s own account of the scene refuses to fully align with Freud’s explanation, as the patient believed the mother to be enjoying the witnessed act rather than it being one of violence. Bersani argues that instead of fearing the father, the young boy was actually concerned for him and his adult penis, which would disappear and then reappear when penetrating the mother.

⁴² Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 327.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 330.

He contends that the stool that the young boy produced was therefore a gift to replace the father's missing penis. The 'disappearing penis', hidden in the female genitals, combined with Freud's assertion that all of the castration threats levied at the patient during childhood had come from women, leads Bersani to question Freud's staunch belief that the father inhabits the role of potential castrator, writing that "no amount of evidence will deter Freud from giving the father the dubious privilege of exercising his castrating prerogative."⁴⁴ Like Edelman, Bersani argues that Freud forces the Wolf-Man's vision into his heteronormative narrative of the castrating father and passive mother. Yet Bersani proposes that the relationship between the Wolf-Man and his father can be interpreted to tell a story of gay love that refuses the distinction between castrating father and passive mother, penetrator and penetrated. This would entail that gender distinctions could be transcended.

Although in both these readings of Constantinovitch's case the mother fades into the background in the face of homosocial relationships, Edelman and Bersani's analyses do reveal how Freud's insistence on the universal application of his theories of sexual development, castration and Oedipal desire leads him to contradict himself or manipulate the patient's story in order to fit his pre-established formula. Instead, what can be revealed through a queer engagement with the case is the fluidity of gender roles that exists within the mind of the child. Although the Wolf-Man's memories and later neuroses are of a sexual manner, this eroticism is formed in the later stages of early childhood and is therefore socially influenced, rather than, as Freud would argue, phylogenetically inherited. This undermines Freud's arguments about the sexual component of the womb phantasy, as well as his insistence that it is the primal scene that represents a search for origins.

⁴⁴ Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 110.

The Horror of the Desire for the Maternal Womb

Peter Gay argues that throughout his work “Freud exiled mothers to the margins of his case histories”.⁴⁵ This is certainly true in the case of the Wolf-Man, where although the patient identifies with his mother, Freud is keen to use the case to discuss the fear of castration, thus shoring up his phallogentric theory of the development of childhood sexuality. If womb phantasies are seen primarily as the representation of the desire to have sex with either parent, even if they take the feminine position, they are still dependent on penetration. But if the womb phantasy is detached from this phallogentrism, it opens up a new area for feminist critique. As discussed above, in many of his brief references to the maternal womb Freud takes on a philosophical tone, positing it as a mythical space rather than the actual organ of reproduction. The greatest example of this is in his essay ‘The Uncanny’.

It is in ‘The Uncanny’ that Freud fully elucidates his beliefs about the role of the maternal womb in psychic life. In this piece he seeks to explain the feeling of *das Unheimliche* (the uncanny), that which is strangely frightening yet also familiar to the individual. Freud’s definition of the uncanny comes partly from Schelling who wrote that it is “*the name for everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light*”.⁴⁶ Freud argues that the experience of the uncanny occurs when something that has been hidden from the conscious mind through repression is suddenly revealed. Therefore what causes this emotion is nothing new, but was originally experienced, seen or felt sometime before. This definition works in parallel with the first section of his essay, where Freud performs an etymological study of the word *un/heimlich*.⁴⁷ In German the term *heimlich* has two definitions. Firstly it

⁴⁵ Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York: Norton, 1988), 505.

⁴⁶ Freud, ‘The Uncanny,’ 224.

⁴⁷ Literally translated as un/homely *heim* = home, *lich* = ly. There are many problems relating to the German term ‘*heimlich*’ as it does not translate directly into any other language. The English term

connotes that which belongs to the home, is homely or familiar. It implies the intimate or friendly, that which encourages contentment or the feeling of peace within one's home. The second definition is originally linked to the first. *Heimlich* can connote being secretive, or hiding something. The more this second definition is expanded upon, the further it travels from the first as it comes to signify evil intent or maliciousness. *Heimlich*, through the continuation of its definition, eventually becomes *unheimlich*, yet importantly this is a subjective experience. That which is *heimlich* for one may be *unheimlich* for another, and, as Freud argues, that which once may have been known, may be repressed into being unknown, only to be experienced again.

In 'The Uncanny' there are four direct references to the female genitalia, the first two of which come from definitions of the word *heimlich* and could be seen to apply to both sexes. Freud first cites the *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*, which provides the example of "*heimlich* places (which good manners oblige us to conceal)".⁴⁸ He then quotes from *Grimm's Dictionary*, which reads: "*Heimlich* parts of the body, *pudenda*...the men that died not were smitten on their heimlich parts."⁴⁹ Freud also records two experiences of the uncanny that extend from the womb. First he argues that the fearful phantasy of being buried alive is uncanny due to it being the repression of the desire to return to the womb, and secondly he states that the actual female genitals are uncanny in their very nature of being the original residence of man:

homely may be a direct translation, but this does not encompass the secretive or subversive nature of heimlich. For this reason the term uncanny is used to connote this experience. However 'uncanny' does not signify the nature of the home that is so critical to the German expression. Therefore this thesis will use both the terms *heimlich* and uncanny, the former in specific relation to ideas of the home and the familiar, and the latter when speaking of the psychological experience brought about by certain events.

⁴⁸ Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 223.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that ‘Love is home-sickness’; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: ‘this place is familiar to me, I’ve been here before’, we may interpret the place as being his mother’s genitals or her body. In this case too, then, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix ‘un’ [‘un-’] is the token of repression.⁵⁰

Throughout this essay Freud attempts to use his exploration of the uncanny to strengthen his theory of the castration complex. Yet the example that he provides here – one that he sees as a “beautiful confirmation” of his understanding of experience – is not tied to the fear of losing the penis, but the desire to return to the maternal womb.⁵¹ Further to this, these words are the clearest expression of Freud’s division of the mother into the mythical maternal and the biological female body. Although Strachey’s English translation of the original text has made Freud’s nuanced references more concrete, “once upon a time and in the beginning” suggests both religion and fantasy without making a direct reference to either.⁵² This implicitly presents the womb as a mythical space, rather than emphasising its biological role. Freud’s use of *Heimat* too in the original text reinforces this idea of a mythological space, the womb being analogous to the symbolic idea of nationhood.

When this passage is combined with his previous discussion of the fear of premature burial as representing a repressed phantasy of intra-uterine life, it becomes clear that Freud is drawing a direct line between the womb as a site of origin, and also

⁵⁰ Freud, ‘The Uncanny,’ 245.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The original German reads “Es kommt oft vor, daß neurotische Männer erklären, das weibliche Genitale sei ihnen etwas Unheimliches. Dieses Unheimliche ist aber der Eingang zur alten Heimat des Menschenkindes, zur Örtlichkeit, in der jeder einmal und zuerst gewohnt hat. Liebe ist Heimweh, behauptet ein Scherzwort, und wenn der Träumer von einer Örtlichkeit oder Landschaft noch im Träume denkt: Das ist mir bekannt, da war ich schon einmal, so darf die Deutung dafür das Genitale oder den Leib der Mutter einsetzen.” “Es war einmal” is the German equivalent to “once upon a time” common in fairy tales, whilst “zuerst gewohnt” or “first dwelt”, although not directly religious is a poetic turn of phrase that could be read legitimately as referencing the Christian religion.

one of death. This is by no means the first time that Freud made such a suggestion. In a footnote added to *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1909 he writes:

It was not for a long time that I learned to appreciate the importance of phantasies and unconscious thoughts about life in the womb. They contain an explanation of the remarkable dread that many people have of being buried alive; and they also afford the deepest unconscious basis for the belief in survival after death, which merely represents the projection into the future of this uncanny life before birth. *Moreover, the act of birth is the first experience of anxiety, and thus the source and prototype of the affect of anxiety.*⁵³

I propose that this connection between life and death is highly important in the analysis of the representation of the maternal womb in horror and extreme cinema. Freud argues here that the womb is the symbol of the cycle of life, representing the belief that the soul can be reborn, or exist after the body has decayed. This belief is necessary, if only as a momentary suspension of disbelief for entertainment's sake, when watching supernatural films. Freud also argues that birth is the very first experience of anxiety, and therefore all feelings of that nature link back to this original experience. Horror cinema, especially ghost or supernatural films, provides pleasurable doses of anxiety, and this anxiety can last after the film has ended with the ultimate unknown possibility of life after death. Yet Freud is not proposing that anxiety is the recreation of a conscious memory of birth, nor that the newborn infant would have a psyche that was developed enough to understand these physical and psychological sensations. He even goes as far as to dismiss much of Otto Rank's work on birth, arguing that it is not credible that an infant would be able to remember any of the tactile sensations of birth and that childhood phobias therefore should not be linked back to this initial trauma. Instead, Freud argues that the anxiety experienced in birth and in the initial stages of the newborn infant's life is through object loss: the separation from the mother. He contends that there is little difference between intra-

⁵³ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 400-401 n. 3.

uterine life and the earliest stages of infancy as the child is still fully dependent on the mother. Whereas in the womb this dependency is purely biological, once born this is exchanged for a psychic object-relation between a child and its mother.

Therefore the womb, through the act of intra-uterine life support and birth is something that can remind humans of their first anxiety state and the emotional issues surrounding the initial object-loss of the mother. It also represents the ability to be reborn, a new start, or the wonder of the creation of life. This duality is flipped once more into the spiritual, where the womb can also be seen as representing a life beyond – or before – the world. It is a place where the soul is not necessarily connected to a body, but instead lies in wait to be born. Freud appears to be suggesting that the belief in life after death is projected onto a belief in life before birth: an unconscious desire for eternal life, or a manner in which to cope with the fear of death. Freud only makes these suggestions in passing, but as will be demonstrated over the following four chapters, they are highly relevant to the representation of the maternal womb in horror and extreme cinema, and present a brief moment where his phallogentric master thesis slips and the importance of the maternal to the psyche is revealed.

The Urge to Restore An Earlier State of Things: The Death Drive, Cinematic Pleasure and the Womb Phantasy

In addition to ‘The Uncanny’ there is one further Freudian theory where the psychoanalyst draws implicit links between the maternal womb and mortality: the death drive. In her book *Speaking the Unspeakable* Diane Jonte-Pace argues that under the Oedipal masterplot that runs throughout Freud’s work there exists a counterthesis linking religion, death and maternity.⁵⁴ She contends that in a small

⁵⁴ Diane Jonte-Pace, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Religion, Misogyny and the Uncanny Mother in Freud’s Cultural Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

number of key texts the figure of the uncanny mother is present, drawing together the maternal and death, and threatening Freud's focus on the power and superiority of the father in the structuring of the psyche. This connection between the mother and mortality (as well as immortality) is also discussed by Sprengnether, who points towards the limited but important works by Freud where the Oedipal masterplot starts to waver and the importance of the pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother is revealed.⁵⁵ Both theorists see Freud's introduction of the death drive to psychoanalytic theory as a prime example of this slippage towards the embrace of the pre-Oedipal mother, and Freud's attempt to fight against it.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud proposes that instead of attempting to understand the psyche as a balance between the forces of pleasure and unpleasure, a more fundamental conflict shapes the human mind: that of the life instinct and death instinct. In an argument that would go on to be one of his most controversial and refuted declarations, Freud proposed that "the aim of all life is death", and that all organisms, including humans, seek to return to an inanimate state of being, an instinct that he called the death drive.⁵⁶ Although Freud does not explicitly refer to the womb, a link could be drawn between the "initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads" and the existence in the maternal body.⁵⁷ But is this the same as the womb phantasy?

As the title suggests, in this work Freud proposes that the desire for pleasure may not actually dominate over the other mental processes, as not all actions lead to pleasure. Instead he argues that although there is a tendency towards achieving pleasure, that goal is opposed by other forces working within the psyche:

⁵⁵ Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother*, 120-153.

⁵⁶ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), SE XVIII, 38.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

Under the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the *reality principle*. This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step in the long indirect road to pleasure.⁵⁸

Further to this, the ego itself can work to oppose certain pleasures that are incompatible with it. These are often instincts that have been repressed in early life, such as certain sexual instincts, and if they are experienced later on it is actually as a source of unpleasure. Freud contends that neurotic unpleasure extends from such repressed instincts: "pleasure that cannot be felt as such".⁵⁹

A key area of his research in this text is the compulsion to repeat, and the desire to make traumatic experiences controllable through repetition. He explains that anxiety, fear and fright should not be seen as synonymous. Anxiety, argues Freud, is a state where danger is expected and prepared for, even if the danger itself is unknown. Fear requires a specific thing to be scared of, whilst fright is an experience of surprise when a danger is encountered which the person is not prepared for. Therefore Freud proposes that anxiety cannot lead to traumatic neuroses, as it is a form of protection against fright. He argues that dreams allow for a means to explore traumatic neuroses as they bring the patient back to the original source of their trauma, from which they awake with another fright. The sufferer will remain fixated on this initial fright, and re-live it over and over again during sleep. Freud also utilises an example taken from his own family life. He recalls a favourite game played by his grandson Ernst where the young boy threw a cotton reel on a length of string over the edge of his cot with an exclamation of "fort!" (gone), before drawing it back in again with a happy cry of "da!" (there). Freud explains that Ernst had a very close and loving relationship with

⁵⁸ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

his mother, but was also content and calm when she had to leave his side. He proposes that this game was the means by which the child was able to master the emotions connected to his mother leaving him, and overcome them. Freud writes that this was Ernst's "greatest cultural achievement - the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting".⁶⁰ Freud contends that the boy compensated himself for her departure by making objects disappear and then reappear, re-enacting an unpleasurable experience (his mother's departure) and a pleasurable one (her return). However, Freud writes that the first half of the game, where an object was thrown away, was played with far more frequency. He argues that this could be due to it enabling Ernst to move from a passive position of being left, to an active one of discarding or leaving an object. Through the repetition of the unpleasurable event of being left the boy was able to gain mastery over it and play an active part. Yet the psychoanalyst also proposes that an alternative explanation could be given. Instead of an attempt at mastery the child could instead be taking revenge on the mother by sending the object (representing her) away himself. Simultaneously, he was passing the disagreeable experience of being left onto something, or someone, else.

These two examples provided by Freud present a potential relevance to horror and extreme cinema spectatorship. As discussed above, horror cinema allows for pleasurable doses of anxiety, including a building up of tension before a relief. This anxiety is not traumatic, because in most cases when a horror film is watched the spectator is prepared for a fright. This could explain why people can watch horror and extreme cinema and their violent, shocking or scary depictions, without it causing any lasting trauma, and instead even providing pleasure. This is not to say that in some

⁶⁰ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 15.

circumstances a film may cause trauma, but it would have to be through a shock or fright that the viewer is completely not prepared for, such as if a child were to watch a horror film without any understanding of what the genre entails.

Further to this link between the spectatorship of horror and extreme films and anxiety, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud discusses the connection of childhood play to the dramatic arts, which can in turn be used in a discussion of cinema. He writes:

[The] artistic play and artistic imitation carried out by adults, which, unlike children's, are aimed at an audience, do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable. This is convincing proof that, even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind.⁶¹

This was an idea that Freud had previously explored in the essay 'Psychopathic Characters on the Stage'.⁶² In this posthumously published piece Freud argued that the experience of watching a dramatic performance allows for a build up and then discharge of certain excitations, and performs the same functions that the act of play does for the child. The audience member is able to identify with the hero of the story, whilst at the same time is comforted by the knowledge that the events are not actually happening to them personally. Freud contends that therefore the audience member's enjoyment is "based on an illusion" and that their suffering is mitigated by the fact that it is someone else who is really under threat, and the reassurance that it is after all, just a play.⁶³ Freud proposes that simultaneously, drama allows for a covert experience of repressed mental content. Using the example of what he reads as the Oedipal subtext in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Freud contends that in the same manner

⁶¹ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 17.

⁶² Freud, 'Psychopathic Characters on the Stage' (1905 or 1906), SE VII, 305-310.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 306.

that the character is unable to acknowledge such repressed content, the spectator also undergoes a similar experience in relation to their own history of such desires:

It appears as a necessary precondition of this form of art that the impulse that is struggling into consciousness, however clearly it is recognisable, is never given a definite name; so that in the spectator too the process is carried through with his attention averted, and he is in the grip of his emotions instead of taking stock of what is happening. A certain amount of resistance is no doubt saved in this way, just as, in analytic treatment, we find derivatives of the repressed material reaching consciousness, owing to a lower resistance, while the repressed material itself is unable to do so.⁶⁴

Freud's argument could be extended to other forms of repressed content that come from the early stages of development in childhood. The womb phantasy would therefore be such a form of repressed desire. Instead of the want to return to the mother-child symbiotic union being expressed explicitly, it is still experienced but on a covert or symptomatic level. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the manifestation of the womb phantasy subtext in horror is often the combination of the representation of the mother-child bond as dangerous, with symbolic references towards the love for the mother and the desire for unification (which actually poses the greater challenge to patriarchal society and therefore must be more deeply repressed). Horror cinema, like Freud's reading of dramatic plays, can allow for an experience of repressed content that is not conscious during the enraptured process of viewing, but can be revealed when approaching the cultural product at a critical distance. Further to this, by drawing together Freud's discussion of the dramatic arts across *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and 'Psychopathic Characters on the Stage', it is possible to propose that this covert and vicarious experience of repressed content is also one that is tied to anxiety and catharsis, as even the most traumatic experiences witnessed on stage or screen are at once both personal (revealing such content) and

⁶⁴ Freud, 'Psychopathic Characters on the Stage,' 309-310.

separate (occurring to someone else). Therefore, even though the repressed material may be under normal circumstances threatening to the ego, it can be safely experienced, and even produce some form of pleasure.

Freud proposes that in many normal cases, a repetitive experience of something is often ultimately a source of pleasure, such as in childhood play where the same game is performed over and over again. However, he argues that when it comes to psychoanalytic treatment and neuroses, the compulsion to repeat overrides the pleasure principle. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud contends that during analysis patients with a traumatic neuroses are unable to understand repressed content as being something that belongs to the past, and are only able to experience it as a contemporary event that is, in some instances, repeated over and over again. Through this avoidance of the source of the repressed content the ego is therefore operating under the pleasure principle, as it seeks to halt any unpleasure that may arise from the repressed content being fully experienced and understood. This leads Freud to conclude that much of the psychic content that is re-experienced through the compulsion to repeat extends from the repressed early instinctual impulses that were at one time connected to pleasure, but would now cause unpleasure. Freud notes that at the same time, the compulsion to repeat can also extend from experiences that hold absolutely no potential for pleasure, and that could never have brought any sense of satisfaction. This leads him to conclude that the compulsion to repeat is something “that seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides”.⁶⁵ Instead he argues that the human instincts are linked

⁶⁵ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 23.

to the compulsion to repeat through what he sees as a “universal attribute of instincts and perhaps organic life in general”: the death drive.⁶⁶ He proposes:

*It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life.*⁶⁷ [Freud’s italics]

Freud writes that whereas previously it was thought that the instincts drove the psyche towards change that maybe the opposite is true, and that life is ultimately conservative in nature. It is this conservatism that drives the organism towards repetition rather than progress, but it is a repetition that seeks to return to the beginning:

...it must be an *old* state of things... If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that ‘*the aim of all life is death*’ and, looking backwards, that ‘*inanimate things existed before living ones*’.⁶⁸ [Freud’s italics]

Freud contends that the very first instinct was the instinct to return to an inanimate state, in other words, to die. In his view this does not entail that there is no desire for self-preservation in more developed life forms, but this operates only so that the body can continue along its predestined and natural path towards death. A dualism is therefore created between the death drive, which Freud argues operates without intruding on the psyche, and Eros, the life drive or instinct. Linked to the sexual instincts and reproduction, the life instinct is that part of an organism that seeks to survive after death (yet still bringing the organism back to an earlier state). But it is important to note that sexuality itself should not be considered as belonging to Eros, but instead is entwined in a relationship with the death drive.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 36

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 38

⁶⁹ For a further discussion of this relationship see: Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (1970), trans. Jeffery Mehlerman, (London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985).

When considering this return “to an earlier state of things” alongside Freud’s writing on the womb in ‘The Uncanny’, links can be drawn in his thinking between the death drive and the desire to return to the maternal body. For example, the inclusion of his grandson’s *fort/da* game provides an illustration of the desire to return to the embrace of the mother, and the psyche’s attempt to master such a wish. Sadly, the boy’s mother – Freud’s favourite daughter Sophie – died from pneumonia shortly before the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud was keen that the text should not be read as being autobiographical, and even asked his friend Max Eitingon to confirm that he had read the piece before Sophie’s death. However, Gay argues that the term *Todestrieb* (death drive) only entered into Freud’s correspondence after his daughter’s passing, concluding that “the loss can claim a subsidiary role, if not in the making of his analytic preoccupation with destructiveness, then in determining its weight”.⁷⁰ Jonte-Pace argues that the little boy’s game becomes a “metaphor for life and death”, viewing its inclusion in Freud’s analysis as vitally important as it enables the understanding of a drive that is formulated around the figure of the mother rather than the father.⁷¹ Yet, as Jonte-pace explains, in this work as with the majority of Freud’s writing, the importance of the mother still only forms a subtext:

The story of the absent/dead mother and the child’s game establish a structure which is reenacted in the theoretical argument of the text: maternal absence/death and the alternating *da* and *fort* of the child’s game provide the foundation and paradigm for the drive towards death theorised by Freud.⁷²

Likewise, Sprengnether also contends that the *fort/da* game is representative of the text as a whole through its paradoxical representation of the mother as both origin and site of death (the ‘*da*’ of the creation of life and the ‘*fort*’ of death). She contends that

⁷⁰ Gay, *Freud*, 395.

⁷¹ Jonte-Pace, *Speaking the Unspeakable*, 48.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 49.

in Freud's work, reunification with the mother as a point of origin can only be achieved in death, and as such life is actually a journey back towards its start.

For Freud then, especially in the later years of his career, the figure of the mother is linked to both the origin and the end of life, yet it is still a connection that has to be sort out between the lines of his texts, and found in the odd passing statement or metaphor. For example, near the end of his life Freud gestures towards the death drive by returning once more to the comparison between the existence in the womb and the act of sleep, when he writes: "We are justified in saying that there arises at birth an instinct to return to the inter-uterine life that has been abandoned – an instinct to sleep. Sleep of this kind is a return to the womb."⁷³ This would suggest that the "earlier state of things" that the death drives seeks is the body of the mother. This is a element of Freud's work where the desire to return to the womb does move away from Oedipal sexual wishes directed towards the parents, yet it is still overtly problematic. As Sprengnether and Jonte-Pace both argue, the death drive shows that Freud had a secret preoccupation with the pre-Oedipal mother, but her love is ultimately deadly, as a return to her womb would involve a complete eradication of stimuli. Therefore the return to origins that is associated with the death drive is *not* the same as the womb phantasy, as even in Freud's own work, his discussions of the latter often involve a sense of pleasure and duration. He talks about comfort and safety in the womb, and of being cherished by the loving mother. These are positive emotions and sensations, rather than a lack of them altogether.

⁷³ Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (1940 [1938]), SE XXIII, 166.

Conclusion

The following four chapters of this thesis will provide evidence for my assertion that the womb phantasy is not about Oedipal desire, nor the wish to return to the actual maternal womb, but instead the symbiotic union. This distinction between returning to the body of the mother and the return to the mother-child dyad is an important one as it positions the womb phantasy as a positive association with the mother (or primary care giver), rather than a desire for the eradication of consciousness suggested by the ‘inertia’ that is the goal of the death drive. A desire to return to the actual womb would equate to such a death, whereas the various international psychoanalytic theories that I will draw from will demonstrate how the womb phantasy – as a return to the symbiotic union – is actually about life, love and self-preservation. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud reflects the patriarchal society in which he lives, a society that is ever seeking to escape its own desire for the maternal. This desire threatens its very foundations, for it repositions the mother as a site of origin and also a figure that flips the power dynamic between men and women, as her control is desired. I will argue that the wish to return to the loving embrace of the symbiotic union is repressed in patriarchal society and covered over by positioning a return to the mother as a move towards death. The pleasure of the symbiotic union is overridden in a patriarchal defence mechanism and replaced with the unpleasure of the devouring monstrous mother, or the subtle pull of the death drive. Therefore Freud’s occupation with the maternal body as a site of origin that also leads to death was not his own isolated belief, but one that is formed by the more general patriarchal fear of the female body, and its oppression of the importance of, and love for, the mother; a love that would challenge its homosocial domination. This need to transform the womb phantasy in to something monstrous and deadly allows

patriarchy to shore up its own position in power, and explains the links between the maternal and death that are seen in wider culture, especially horror and extreme cinema. Subsequently, such films may appear to be the death drive writ large, but it is vitally important to remember that this is a patriarchal reaction to the womb phantasy: a reaction to the desire to return to the symbiotic union of love, care and happiness.

Chapter 2

Phantasies of Origin: France

This chapter will explore the representation of the mother and the maternal in French horror and extreme cinema, focusing on the position of the maternal body as a site of origins: the origin of the human body that has been born of woman, and the origin of the psyche, which comes into being through the symbiotic relationship with the mother. Moving on from the previous chapter's discussion of the womb in Freudian theory, the analysis presented here will provide a direct critique of Freud's conceptions of femininity and maternity. In order to fully understand the importance of the womb phantasy and the need to shift it from Freud's phallogentric and sex-orientated understanding to one of the symbiotic relationship between mother and child, it is necessary to take such a step back and consider the building blocks on which patriarchal societies' understanding of motherhood and the womb is formed. To do so I will use the work of three French theorists (Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Didier Anzieu) to explore the position of the reproductive female body as a combative site in French psychoanalytic theory, whilst simultaneously linking these debates to the wider patriarchal construction and control of the feminine and the maternal. First I will use the work of Irigaray to investigate how the womb is positioned within the patriarchal construction of femininity. I propose that Irigaray's feminist critique aligns with the filmmaking of Catherine Breillat, as both seek to rupture patriarchal society from within, in order to create the potential for woman-as-subject and re-establish the maternal womb as the point of origin of humankind. The chapter will then turn to the work of Kristeva and her theory of the abject, to carry out an exploration of the character of the pregnant protagonist in two French horror films. Drawing on the continual presence of mother-figures in French horror cinema

between 2003 and 2104, as well as questions of nationhood which were integral to this period in French politics and society, I will argue that these works engage with the position of the womb as a border between self and other, interiority and exteriority. Finally, this chapter will provide a detailed reading of François Ozon's *See the Sea*, to demonstrate how Anzieu's theory of the Skin Ego could be used as a means to rid the womb phantasy of the phallocentrism of Oedipal desire and the patriarchal requirement that the mother must be rejected and the love for her repressed.

The Cinema of the (Maternal) Body

In 2004 James Quandt wrote an article for *Art Forum International* discussing “the growing vogue for shock tactics” in French cinema since the 1990s.¹ Quandt's ‘New French Extremity’ was described in bodily terms, a trend “determined to break every taboo, to wade in rivers of viscera and spumes of sperm, to fill each frame with flesh, nubile or gnarled, and subject it to all manner of penetration, mutilation, and defilement.”² This new extreme cinema from directors such as Bruno Dumont, Gaspar Noé, Claire Denis and Marina de Van, took some of its imagery and visual themes from horror, exploitation movies and pornography, using them to depict often complex and sexually motivated philosophical and social issues. As such it broke down the boundary between auteur and genre cinema. The New French Extremism is not a genre, for it spans genres, borrowing and confusing generic conventions to surprise and shock the viewer. Nor is it a collective or school, as the directors do not publicly align themselves with one another. Quandt even argues that these directors

¹ James Quandt, ‘Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema,’ *Art Forum International* 42, no. 6 (Feb 2004): 127.

² *Ibid.*, 127-128.

are too disparate to even be considered a movement.³ However I disagree: I propose that the New French Extremism should be regarded as a movement, as the directors share an obsession with the spectacle of the visual and the embodiment of the sensual, of showing the previously un-shown, be that the depths of the body, the gritty realism of societal decay or the depravity of broken sexual taboos. These films may be disparate in style and content, but they share an approach that seeks to push cinema to the limits of representation.

Tim Palmer believes that the works of these French directors evoke a *cinéma du corps*, displaying a ‘brutal intimacy’ that obsesses over the body and its boundaries. Sex – although graphic and sometimes un-simulated – is portrayed as dispassionate, “intimacy itself depicted as fundamentally aggressive, devoid of romance, lacking a nurturing instinct or empathy of any kind.”⁴ Palmer argues that this brutal intimacy occurs not only between the characters on screen, but also extends out to the viewer who is forced to bear witness to the acts carried out. This theory is shared by Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, who, in the introduction to their edited collection *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, argue that European extreme cinema differs from extreme Asian films or the torture porn coming from the USA through its “uncompromising and highly self-reflexive appeal to the spectator.”⁵

In the years after the initial controversy caused by these French auteurs, the country’s new generation of horror directors started to also attract international attention. Since 2007 French horror cinema has experienced a rebirth in national and international popularity and critical recognition. Preceded by the release of *Haute Tension* (*High Tension/Switchblade Romance*, Alexandre Aja) in 2003, a stream of

³ Quandt, ‘Flesh and Blood,’ 132.

⁴ Tim Palmer, *Brutal Intimacy* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 57-58.

⁵ Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, ‘Introduction,’ in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, ed. by Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 1.

innovative films has been produced, with original narratives and bold use of sex and violence. The films that have spawned this rebirth do not all sit completely within the conventions of the horror genre, but instead are positioned at the boundary between horror and extreme cinema. With their philosophically or socially motivated and innovative plots, and willingness to include graphic sex and realistic violence in everyday settings, these films attempt to do something more than just shock. Instead they create a visceral reaction in their audience by pushing the representation of the body in both violent and sexual situations to the limit, whilst simultaneously raising ontological questions about sexuality, desire, and the emotions.

This nature of this questioning makes these films fertile ground for psychoanalytic examination. In his guest editorial marking the introduction of film reviews to the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Glen Gabbard writes:

[A]udiences do not attend films merely to be entertained. They queue up at the local multiplex to encounter long-forgotten but still powerful anxieties that stem from universal developmental experiences. By confronting them at a distance in a darkened cinema, they have the opportunity to master those anxieties vicariously and leave enriched and relieved. As with all forms of art, when we study film, we study ourselves.⁶

Gabbard is discussing the cinematic experience in general, but I propose that this is especially the case with French horror and extreme cinema, and the focus on sexuality, violence and the base human instincts that are inherent to these works. Their exploration of the ontological nature of humankind, and the attempts to reveal and engage with the darkest recesses of the unconscious aligns with the particular approach to psychoanalytic theory that predominates in France. Psychoanalysis has been used in the country as a means to explore the secrets of the unconscious, and the interaction between society and the individual, just as much as it has been a medical

⁶ Glen O. Gabbard, 'The Psychoanalyst at the Movies,' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 78 (1997): 433.

tool to maintain happiness and relieve neuroses.⁷ During his lifetime Freud was well aware of the form that psychoanalysis was taking in the country. “In France the interest in psycho-analysis began among the men of letters,” he writes, “[t]o understand this, it must be borne in mind that from the time of the writing of *The Interpretation of Dreams* psycho-analysis ceased to be purely a medical subject.”⁸ Freud saw such an engagement with the arts, history, religion and folklore as an essential component of psychoanalysis, allowing for its full potential to be realised.

Elizabeth Roudinesco argues that there is no such thing as French psychoanalysis, but rather only a ‘French situation’ of psychoanalysis. She writes: “theory, like thought itself, knows neither national boundaries nor homelands, but the conditions under which it is pursued are always national and language-bound.”⁹ These conditions can have a great effect on the approach to psychoanalysis, for as Jane Gallop has noted, there are large divergences in the form that psychoanalytic exploration has taken across the world.¹⁰ One of the clearest divides is between the ego psychology that dominated psychoanalysis in America with its focus on a medical approach to treatment (as will be discussed in Chapter 3), and the emphasis on the unconscious and the willingness to bring psychoanalysis, philosophy and the humanities together in France. France’s relationship with psychoanalysis has arguably a more complex history than any other country in the world. It is one that is dominated by two key

⁷ Although this is not unique to France, as will be discussed in Chapter 3 it is in contrast with America, where the American Psychoanalytic Association purposely positioned psychoanalysis as a medical treatment.

⁸ Freud, *An Autobiographical Study*, (1925 [1924]) SE XX, 62.

⁹ Elizabeth Roudinesco, Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985 [1986], trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xvii. Although I agree with Roudinesco’s sentiments, it is common practice to refer to a country’s psychoanalytic output as ‘French psychoanalysis’ or ‘Japanese psychoanalysis’, therefore this thesis will follow that style for clarity of expression. The overall project of this thesis does read psychoanalysis as being interpreted through different cultures and societies, so subsequently it is very much in line with Roudinesco’s approach.

¹⁰ Jane Gallop, ‘Psychoanalysis in France,’ *The Scholar & Feminist* 30, nos. 3.3 and 4.1 (Fall 2005): no pagination, accessed September, 1 2015, <http://sfonline.barnard.edu/sfxxx/documents/gallop.pdf>.

figures: Freud himself, and Jacques Lacan. To state that Freud is a key figure in French psychoanalysis may seem rather obvious, but as Alain Gibeault argues, Freudian theory is integral to both the clinical and exploratory sides of psychoanalysis in the country:

More than for any other school of thought in psychoanalysis worldwide, the link between Freud and French psychoanalysis is a special and fundamental relationship, because the reference to Freud's concepts has a direct influence on our clinical understanding. In other countries, Freud's thinking is seen as belonging to the past, whereas in France it is still considered to be very much alive and topical.¹¹

The reason for this continued importance of Freudian thought to French psychoanalysis is the pervasive influence of Lacan.¹² Throughout his career Lacan proposed a 'return to Freud'. This entailed not simply a focus on Freud's texts in an attempt to gain a new, more accurate reading, but instead as Shoshana Felman explains, it is a return to the Freud that defies translation, "a return to the unconscious – both *in* Freud's text and *of* Freud's text – not as a domesticated, reassuring answer but as an irreducibly uncanny question."¹³ It is this manner of trying to inhabit Freud's thinking that has remained resolute to psychoanalysis in France, and even though Lacan's own return to Freud can also be seen as a 'reinvention' due to his focus on linguistic structuralism, the tie between Freud and French psychoanalysis remains to this day.¹⁴

¹¹ Alain Gibeault, 'History of Psychoanalysis in France: Introduction,' in *Reading French Psychoanalysis*, eds. Dana Birksted-Breen, Sara Flanders and Alain Gibeault (London: Routledge, 2010), 56.

¹² For a more detailed overview of the history of psychoanalysis in France see: Dana Birksted-Breen and Sarah Flanders, 'General Introduction,' in *Reading French Psychoanalysis*, 1-51. Amongst Lacan's contributions to psychoanalysis are the categories of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic. These orders will appear throughout this chapter, so in order to distinguish Lacan's Symbolic from the general psychoanalytic use of the terms symbolism or symbolic (denoting a psychic reference to something else), capital letters will be used for the French theorist's contributions.

¹³ Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), 54.

¹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of this reinvention see: Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's French Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

It is also this focus on the unconscious, the exploration of the origins of the human psyche and the tie to Freudian theory, that positions French psychoanalytic theory as a suitable starting point for a post-Freudian analysis of the womb phantasy. Freud may have argued that the love for the mother was obliterated during the Oedipus complex, but as the constant presence of womb and maternal symbolism in cinema displays, this is not the case. Instead the desire for the mother and the wish to return to the symbiotic union is repressed, occupying the unconscious and waiting for release. This chapter will critically approach Freud's discussion of the feminine and the female body, and show how the patriarchal representation of women and the maternal is still at the forefront of debates in French cinema.

The Origin of (Wo)Man: Breillat, Irigaray and the Primal Phantasy of Origin

Catherine Breillat's *Anatomie de l'enfer* (*Anatomy of Hell*, Catherine Breillat, 2004) opens with the disclaimer:

A film is an illusion, not reality-fiction or a happening. It is a true work of fiction. For the actress's most intimate scenes, a body double was used. It's not her body, it's an extension of a fictional character.

Although the statement was presented so that the audience would not think that the actress who plays the lead role of 'the woman' was actually having sex with 'the man,' or that it is her vagina that is shot in close-up and penetrated during various scenes throughout the film, it could also be read as highlighting the issue that femininity itself is predominantly a patriarchal construction. As discussed by Judith Butler, what is considered to be feminine, or indeed masculine, is a performance; a set of behaviors that are learnt rather than present at birth.¹⁵ Yet in contrast to masculinity – which is in control of its own image – the dominance of patriarchal societies has led

¹⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xiv-xv.

femininity to be constructed as other to the masculine: the passive to its active and the subservient to its dominant. *Anatomy of Hell* explores how this construction of ‘woman’ has led to the female body and its genitals being seen in society as something shameful, disgusting and in need of censure. The film is an investigation of that construction, a study of how the body that enables life has been transformed into a body of nothingness and passivity. The woman calls the man to “watch her where she is unwatchable”, to look closely at her genitals and witness her most intimate acts, in an attempt to break through the barriers of this construction and see what lies beneath.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* Luce Irigaray discusses this construction of femininity through the metaphor of the mirror, arguing that man can only see a lesser version of himself reflected back in the mirror that he holds up to women. Unable – or unwilling – to look directly at her, he can only ever see a reflection of himself, a mirror image. This flat mirror is incapable of showing all her sexual organs as it is unable to go inside of her. Irigaray contends that therefore in phallogentric patriarchal culture the clitoris, vagina and womb must all be subservient to the male member; even combined, their psychic weight is never more than a non-entity, a nothingness that shocks through what is absent. As Irigaray writes in a later text, even though women can be seen to have not one sexual organ but many, it is counted as none: “The negative, the underside, the reverse of the only visible and morphologically designatable organ”.¹⁶ Yet the female genitals, and their power to give life are the one thing that man can never have, nor assert full control over. Patriarchal society cannot exist without the reproductive abilities of the maternal womb, so this womb must be

¹⁶ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* [1977], trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 26.

put in its place as only the lesser, passive, part of the equation. Irigaray argues that as the womb is the origin of humankind, *mankind* is forced to assert dominance over it.

In order to fully understand the position of womb phantasies in patriarchal society it is important to first explore how and why this desire to return to the symbiotic union (symbolised by the maternal womb) is oppressed and repressed. Therefore, instead of looking at womb phantasies *per se*, this section will take a step back to consider the womb itself, and how it is used in the construction of femininity. Key to this is the distinction that I have previously proposed between the mythical maternal and the biological female body. Both are essentially under the influence of patriarchy through the manner in which they are commonly represented and perceived. As Breillat has explored throughout her work, the actual female body is seen as something that is horrific and shameful. The mythical maternal, on the other hand, is something for women to aspire to, yet it is carefully constructed by patriarchal society to have little real power as it only exists as an idea (or ideal). It is femininity cleansed of all threat. The womb phantasy operates on the border of this dialectic. Although it is the mythical maternal that is desired – the total love and care of the mother – it also acts as a reminder that the origin of the physical self is the biological female body.

Drawing on three films from across Breillat's career, I propose that her female protagonists pose three Irigarayan critiques of Freud's interrelating conceptions of passive female sexuality, maternity, and the point of origin of humankind (the womb). Using the motif of the mirror and the search for what lies beneath the patriarchal construction of both the feminine and the maternal, I argue here that these women show the same process of ironic enactment and rupture that Irigaray utilises in her critique of Freud in the essay 'The Blind Spot in an Old Dream of Symmetry'.¹⁷

¹⁷ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 13-129.

Beginning with Breillat's first film *Une vraie jeune fille* (*A Real Young Girl*, Catherine Breillat, 1976), I will argue that the relationship that the protagonist Alice has with her own reflection and her burgeoning sexuality displays the opposition between the construction of femininity and actual female experience. Like Irigaray, Breillat challenges the flatness of the mirror that fails to fully represent the whole female sexual body, only ever presenting women as lacking. Then through an analysis of *Romance* (Catherine Breillat, 1999) I will argue that Marie enacts the Freudian conception of woman to the extreme, deconstructing it and revealing the perversity of a situation where a woman must choose between maternity and sexual pleasure. Finally, I will turn to *Anatomy of Hell*, Breillat's polemic on the construction of femininity. Throughout all these narratives, Breillat challenges the stereotypes of virgin-mother and whore (the virgin and mother being aligned as both do not have access to female sexual pleasure). By doing so, her female protagonists implicitly explore the potential of Irigaray's woman-as-subject: a subject that is female without suffering the constraints of patriarchal 'femininity', one who is able to see in her own (self)reflection everything that she *has* rather than *lacks*.

Irigaray argues that in his three essays on female sexuality Freud reveals the true nature of the phallocentric oppression of women: that it is a desire for the self-same. Sexual difference, argues Irigaray, is therefore "a derivation of the problematics of sameness, it is, now and forever, determined within the project, the projection, the sphere of representation, of the same."¹⁸ She contends that women can only constitute death or nothingness, a lack. Man can overcome this lack through intercourse, and the stressing of his activity in the act of reproduction. Through reproduction the man can produce more of the same, a son, and by giving him his name can enter into

¹⁸ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 26-27.

immortality through the symbolic return to his own point of origin (his conception). In Freud's view, the key features of female sexuality are the two transitions that he believes only girls undergo: the change in object choice from the mother to the father, and the renouncement of clitoral stimulation in favour of the "truly feminine" vagina and the potential satisfaction from penile penetration that it offers.¹⁹ Both these transitions can be seen to perpetuate the patriarchal conception of femininity as a reflection of man, reproducing heterosexual and passive female sexuality, and are therefore highly problematic.

Freud argues that the two sexual zones of women (the clitoris and the vagina) mean that they display the innate bisexuality of humans more clearly than men. However, these two erotogenic zones never appear in his writing to work together. Instead, the young girl must exchange one for the other, renouncing clitoral stimulation so that she may enter 'true' femininity through the vagina. To welcome the pleasurable sensations of the clitoris would, in Freud's view, amount to a masculinity complex. By masculinising the clitoris and arguing that during the pre-Oedipal period the little girl is simply a little man, Freud is denying femininity a history of its own. His theories label femininity as a deformed state, a *not-quite* masculinity without a true origin. To return to the binary of the biological mother and mythical maternal in Freudian psychoanalysis, the clitoris would therefore be the representative of the biological mother as he describes it as a castrated masculine organ. The vagina, and the womb that it leads too, would then stand for the mythical maternal. Freud sees the vagina as the truly feminine female erotogenic zone, but by doing so he is denying the pleasure of the clitoris and is instead locating sexual satisfaction in the potential of entering the maternal.

¹⁹ Freud, 'Femininity' [1933], SE XXII, 118.

In 'Femininity' Freud claims not to use the male/active female/passive binary, arguing that both qualities can be found in either sex. Yet as Irigaray contends, his whole premise is based on the idea that it is man who is the procreator: he who has the 'vehicle' that produces sperm to be 'harboured' in the womb.²⁰ The woman is just a bank into which a deposit is made, her womb a passive receptacle. Irigaray contends that the stressing of the activity of the male in the sexual act and his need to mark the product of that act (the child) with his name, is because he has been deprived of having a womb:

One might be able to interpret the fact of being deprived of a womb as the most intolerable deprivation of man, since his contribution to gestation – his function with regard to the origin of reproduction – is hence asserted as less than evident, as open to doubt.²¹

Man's desire to assert himself in this act is due to his need to create an origin that is masculine more than feminine, one that comes from the womb but is formed by man rather than woman. It is a primal phantasy that negates the biological woman and her actual role in reproduction in favour of the mythical – but in this case ultimately powerless – maternal.

Irigaray contends that the child produced from this male-driven reproduction is always masculine. Paraphrasing Freud's statement that "the little girl is a little man",²² Irigaray writes that "THERE NEVER IS (OR WILL BE) A LITTLE GIRL" (her capitals).²³ Freud does not even consider the possibility of a vaginal or uterine stage through which to speak of female sexuality, with the only option open for women being phallic action, envy, or repression. Even when the little man that the little girl is moves into femininity, this femininity is defined through her sexual organs that demonstrate a direct correlation to the masculine ones, and is timed to pay

²⁰ These are Freud's terms for describing the act of procreation. See: Freud, 'Femininity,' 113.

²¹ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 23.

²² Freud, 'Femininity,' 118.

²³ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 48.

service to the development of the boy. When the young boy renounces masturbation for fear of castration, the girl must respond to his needs and stop her enjoyment of her clitoris, switching to the vagina, the “indispensible instrument of male pleasure”.²⁴ Irigaray contends that the little girl must envy the penis, for this ensures its value. She argues that “If woman had desires other than ‘penis-envy’, this would call into question the unity, the uniqueness, the simplicity of the mirror charged with sending man’s image back to him – albeit inverted.”²⁵ To follow Irigaray’s reading of Freud would be to argue that phallocentric society must label women as shameful, envious, jealous, greedy, desiring of the phallus that they cannot have (all negative traits in the light of the worthiness of masculinity with its sense of justice and ethics) because it cannot comprehend anything that is not related to the phallus.²⁶ Woman must despise her own sex – her erotogenic zones and her pleasure – so that man can reassure himself from his castration anxieties and place himself as the point of all origin.

It is this critique of this phallic domination of the sexes causing women to find shame in their own body and desires that unites Irigaray and Breillat. Both engage with misogynistic patriarchal language and ideas, before turning the male appropriation of the feminine in on itself in order to create a space for a woman-as-subject. Throughout her career Breillat has explored female sexuality, often combining provocative hard-core imagery with philosophical treatises on sex and subjectivity. Her films detail the journey from self-estrangement to independence that her female protagonists embark on, whilst simultaneously challenging the social and cinematic construction of femininity. Breillat’s first film carried out such a project. *A*

²⁴ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 30.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁶ These are character traits of men and women that are all taken from Freud’s three essays on female sexuality. For example in ‘Femininity’ Freud writes “envy and jealousy play an even greater part in the mental life of women than of men” and that this leads them to having “little sense of justice”. Freud, ‘Femininity,’ 125 and 134.

Real Young Girl follows 14 year-old Alice on her holiday from boarding school, staying with her parents in a remote part of France. The film fluctuates between actual events and Alice's sexual fantasies, blurring the boundaries between the two so that the audience are left in a state of limbo, unsure about what is fantasy and what is reality. As with many of her works, Breillat uses a voiceover throughout the film to give voice to Alice's interior monologue, allowing the audience to hear the young girl's thoughts about her parents, her developing sexuality and the loss of her virginity. Three key scenes in the film utilise this technique as Alice inspects herself in her bedroom mirror. Throughout Breillat's films, the mirror returns again and again as a motif of such self-reflection. Breillat's scenes of her female characters looking at their own reflections allow for these women to reflect on both their physical appearance, and undergo a process of psychical self-reflection that enables them to progress in their journeys of sexual discovery. The combination of the reflected image, and the characters' verbal reaction to that image, transforms these moments into an Irigarayan speculum that attempts to open up and reveal female subjectivity.

In *A Real Young Girl* Breillat uses Alice's bedroom mirror to explore the girl's relationship to her body, her gender, and her sexuality. On her first night at home Alice retires to her bedroom and stands in front of her mirror as she undresses, a position that she repeats throughout the film. In the voiceover the young girl says "I only like seeing myself in small bits", as she takes off each item of clothing and replaces it with another. As she carries out this act the camera frames first her thighs and crotch, before moving up her torso to her chest, mirroring her words. Alice's unwillingness to see herself as a complete whole represents her inability to align her emerging adolescent sexuality with the beliefs of her parents and society; the supposed shameful of the female body leaves her no option but to reject her own

image. Adrienne Angelo proposes that the film's use of close-up images of bodies, both male and female, focusing especially on the genitals and orifices such as the mouth and ears, does not, as would be expected, fetishize them.²⁷ Instead, Angelo argues that these visual isolations correspond to a transgressive adolescent perspective. Alice's sexuality is polymorphous, extending beyond just one part of her body. As her sexual awakening continues throughout the film she overcomes her disgust at her own body, and embraces the fact that her developing sexual desires do not fit with the virginal societal ideal. In Douglas Keesey's words, during the process of sexual awakening Alice is able to begin to comprehend that "it is not her body, but others' negative view of it, that is unnatural and obscene".²⁸ She learns to find pleasure in the taboos that surround her genitals and to understand that her body is so much more than can ever be reflected in the flat mirror.



Figure 2.1: Alice's self-reflection in *A Real Young Girl*

In the second scene in front of her bedroom mirror Alice again undresses, this time painting her vagina and nipples with ink to see what she would look like "as a whore". The sight of her painted body shocks Alice, and her voiceover decries: "I can't accept the proximity of my face and my vagina". Even though this is a statement of horror and disgust Alice is now able to comprehend her body as one being, albeit

²⁷ Adrienne Angelo, 'Sexual Cartographies: Mapping Subjectivity in the Cinema of Catherine Breillat,' *Journal for Cultural Research* 14, no. 1 (2010): 46.

²⁸ Douglas Keesey, *Catherine Breillat* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 20.

an abject one. She is caught between the stereotypes of virgin and whore, neither one nor other, but with society offering her no possibility of a middle ground. Yet as the film progresses Alice is able to see that adults do not uphold the moral laws that they preach, with her parents' relationship beginning to break down due to her father's promiscuity. This realisation allows her to fully embrace her own sexuality. In the last scene to be played out in front of her mirror Alice marks the front of her nightshirt with ink claiming it to be "like a sex", marvelling at the dark stain spreading out on the fabric. She grabs a candle and whilst dripping the wax on her fingers – a liquid that is glossy like her own discharge or semen – she declares: "symbols don't scare me". She is able to display her sex with confidence, displaying it on the outside of her clothing.

These three scenes that occur before her bedroom mirror display Alice's changing relationship to her body and her desires. Initially she is unable to comprehend her body, she is then disgusted by it, and finally she learns to accept it. Through fantasy and sexual exploration, Alice is able to make the transition from a child-like pleasure of the erotogenic zones into a sexual being that is in control of her whole body. Alice's moments of reflection in front of the mirror display an Irigarayan interrogation of the inability of that flat surface to fully depict the female body. Alice seeks to understand her own body, and connect together her experiences, desires and sensations with what she is told by society and her parents about how she should behave and how she should regard her physique. After this process she can be seen to reject not just the idea of her body being abject or lacking, but also the necessity of giving up her polymorphous sexuality in place of penetration.

In her book *This Sex Which is Not One* Irigaray continues her discussion of the need for women to renounce clitoral pleasure under Oedipal law.²⁹ Irigaray proposes that in this Freudian conception of femininity, female sexual pleasure (renounced with the ascension to the vagina during childhood) is now long forgotten. Denied access to the scopophilic regime, woman can only exist as a thing to be looked at, but also a site – or sight – of the horror of what *cannot* be seen, the absent penis. This leads Irigaray to explore the potential that touch and interiority hold for female sexuality. She contends that in patriarchal society female touch is controlled through maternity, which is used to “fill the gaps in a repressed female sexuality”, allowing women, within reason and for a finite time, to take pleasure in touching the body of another (her child).³⁰ In the same manner that the girl renounces clitoral pleasure in favour of the vagina, a woman must continually replace her own desire for sexual contact with the contact with her child; the touch of the son replacing the touch of the father, fulfilling the Oedipal phantasy. As with the split between the mythical maternal and the biological body of the mother, the encouragement for the woman to renounce one area of her genitals for another, or to replace her sexual desires with those of motherhood, displays how patriarchal society has a constant need to break apart and control women in order to deny them any power as a fully-formed subject in their own right.

This critique of the use of maternity to replace female sexual desire, and the contrast between the mythical maternal and the biological body of the mother, can also be seen in Breillat’s 1999 film *Romance*. This controversial work depicts a woman’s exploration of her sexuality and its relationship to the men in her life. Once more in *Romance* Breillat uses a voiceover to portray her protagonist’s thoughts. This

²⁹ Irigaray, *This Sex*, 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

inner-monologue gives reason and emotion to Marie's sometimes self-destructive acts, but her words are also incredibly open and brutal:

I want to be a hole, a pit, the more gaping, the more obscene it is, the more it's me, my intimacy, the more I surrender. It's metaphysical. I disappear in proportion to the cock taking me. I hollow myself, that's my purity.

As these words display, Marie is the woman in Freud's conception of femininity (as Irigaray sees her). She is nothing but a receptacle for the penis, only it has the power to complete her. Nevertheless, once Marie has assumed this role she begins to push it, with each sexual relationship becoming more and more of an object. She is "up for grabs" as a "cunt to be stuffed," the ultimate male dream is also her desire: "to know that for some guy, I'm just a pussy he wants to stuff without sentimental bullshit". She fantasises about her body being a void, a nothingness that needs to be filled and penetrated physically; a fantasy that is represented by Breillat visually in one moment of bondage between Marie and Robert. The older man gags Marie by inserting a wad of black fabric into her mouth. The black transforms within this orifice into nothingness, her red lips resembling a vaginal opening, but an opening to an empty void. This image is shocking, yet at the same time it fulfils the male appropriation of the feminine form, rendering Marie's body into nothing more than an empty receptacle. By transforming Marie's body into a void, and gagging her voice, Breillat has created a character that embodies the phallocentric ideal but simultaneously reveals it to be one that constrains, misleads and hides.



Figure 2.2: Marie as the Freudian void in *Romance*

This raises some important questions in relation to the womb phantasy. As discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, although Oedipal desire is the main instigator in Freud's conception of the womb phantasy, he also links the desire with a want for safety, security and comfort. These mythical conceptions of the womb do not tally with the passive void that Freud makes the womb out to be in his work on femininity. This could be due to the threat that the womb poses as the point of origin of humankind. Irigaray contends that under Freud's Oedipal law the boy will always love his mother, and his seeking to be reunited with her is what gives the castration complex its special power. The super-ego that follows in the wake of the dissolution of the Oedipus complex introduces morals and ideals, which do not allow the desire to return to the mother's body. Instead the mythical maternal is created as a means of negation:

Better than *a* mother, then, is the working out of the *idea of the mother*, of the *maternal ideal*. Better to transform the real 'natural' mother into an ideal of the maternal function which no one can ever take away from you. And which will always constitute an *extra* for any woman-mother, an *additional womb* – one of ideas, ideals and theory.³¹

Irigaray contends that Freud's Oedipal process allows 'woman' to be replaced by 'femininity' for the boy. No longer connected to the fleshiness of his origins in the biological body of the mother but now free to create his own point of origin through

³¹ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 81.

his activity in the creation of life. The mythical womb has now been separated from the body of the mother, it is a point of origin devoid of power, celebrated only for its relationship with the son. The woman is now totally consumed by patriarchy, with nothing left but this mythical maternity. As Caroline Bainbridge explains:

[Woman's] mirroring function relegates her to the realm of reproducing patriarchal phallogentric practices, despite the fact that she has no effect on how those practices moderate her existence/desire/identity. Irigaray claims that because of the way women and the feminine have been constructed within phallogentrism, women have no access to a history of their own.³²

I propose that it is this problematic 'ascension' to the mythic maternal can be read into Breillat's feminist critique in *Romance*. The film continually explores not only how women are broken apart metaphorically (such as being made to chose between sexuality and motherhood), but also how they are encouraged to assume a state of mind that is complicit in perpetuating such an idea of femininity.

In *Romance* Breillat continues to use mirrors to allow her female protagonist to undergo a process of inspection, self-reflection and to mark the stages of her transition. At the beginning of the film Marie's inner monologue is first introduced when she is standing in front of a mirror looking at herself. After her affair with Paulo, Marie again looks into this mirror, but her expression has altered. She appears more relaxed and pleased with her actions. By cheating on her boyfriend Paul, and then rejecting Paulo, she has regained some control over her emotions. As the film continues with her next relationship with Robert, the older man makes her look at herself in a mirror before each of the two scenes of bondage. When Marie initially consents to Robert's offers of tying her up, she can only nod and mumble in agreement. As he walks her along the corridor, her dress lifted up over her chest and

³² Caroline Bainbridge, *A Feminine Cinematics: Luce Irigaray, Women and Film* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 24.

her eyes closed, he stops in front of a mirror and demands that she look at herself. Marie's willingness to accept her reflection shows her complicity in these events, as well as Robert's need for that complicity. At their next encounter Robert again draws Marie up to his mirror. Like Alice in *A Real Young Girl*, every time Marie faces her own reflection she has moved forward in her journey for self-discovery. Marie now revels in her reflection, and instructs Robert over the parts of her body that he is not allowed to constrain.

Alice's sentiments that she cannot accept the proximity of her vagina and her face are repeated in Marie's relationship to her sexual organs. After her impregnation by Paul and a hospital visit where a procession of young doctors give her an intimate examination, the film cuts to an over-the-shoulder shot of Marie looking at her vagina in a hand-mirror, the angle of its glass only reflecting her genitals and not her face. As her monologue speaks the words "Paul is right, you can't love a cunt if a face goes with it" Marie turns the mirror so that it reflects her blank expression. This declaration marks a shift in the film, as Breillat starts to visually depict her protagonist's thoughts. In the next scene Marie imagines a place where women lie with a wall dividing their bodies in half, their lower part available to be penetrated anonymously, the upper lying sedate and calm in a sterilised and civilised environment. The split bodies of the women portray Alice and Marie's sentiments that the female genitals and the face should never be seen together, bringing the figures of the virgin and whore into one body, but still keeping these binaries distinct and separated. It is a man's ideal woman, one that is split in two by being sexual and pure (biological and mythical), negating the possibility of woman-as-subject.

Marie's embodiment of the ideal woman does not end there. Through the birth of her son the character of Marie depicts Freud's claim that "[a] mother is only brought

unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; this is altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships.”³³ Marie herself declares: “They say a woman isn’t a woman until she has become a mother”. By naming the child Paul after his father, Marie now has assumed the phallus for herself, with this exchange represented in the close-up images of birth that replace the moments of Paul senior’s death, his penetrating penis being exchanged by his son’s head as it crowns. These images of birth bring to mind the words that Robert reads to Marie earlier on in the film: “As the mother begets the son, the son begets the mother. His act is the creative counterpoint of the process. By begetting the mother he purifies her and himself, *uno acto*. He turns the ‘Babylonian Whore’ into a virgin.” Marie appears to act out these words in a fantasy sequence that follows the birth where she finally seems happy. The closing scenes of the film show Marie in a hospital bed, smiling as she holds her child, before the film cuts to depict her vision of a funeral for Paul. Striding barefooted in a billowing dress, and carrying her child, Marie is represented as a provincial mourning wife, suggesting that motherhood has returned her to a simpler and more natural state, in comparison to the stark surroundings of her city life. Nevertheless, this rebirth into motherhood is not a confirmation of the patriarchal subjugation of women through maternity, for it reveals the ridiculousness of the binary created. Marie has killed her husband at the same time that she gives birth to his son. By becoming a mother/virgin it is as though Marie has renounced or even forgotten her sexual desires, and as such she is now truly happy. Yet this happiness feels like a charade. Like this imagined burial, Marie’s return to purity through motherhood is just an impossible fantasy.

³³ Freud, ‘Femininity,’ 133.

Breillat has been criticised throughout her career for using pornographically explicit images in her work and scenes of female masochism, with *Romance* being seen as the predominant example of this. Martine Beugnet argues that Breillat's female characters "defy the usual patterns of 'progressive' gender portrayals" and as such form a narrative that may on the surface appear to be played out within masculine parameters.³⁴ Ginette Vincendeau's assessment of *Romance* aligns with this view, with Vincendeau asking the question: "Is the price Breillat pays for auteur recognition that of endorsing male-pleasing fantasies of what 'masochistic' women supposedly want?"³⁵ But as Beugnet's analysis points towards, these masculine parameters exist in Breillat's work to be torn apart and critiqued. In this manner she can be seen to echo Irigaray's position of an interrogation from within, and a re-appropriation of patriarchal doctrine. Irigaray has also received intense criticism for such a project. Dorothy Leland critiques Irigaray for the lack of an empirical basis for her theoretical assertions, arguing that like Freud and Lacan she makes generalisations and universal claims.³⁶ Additionally, feminist scholars such as Toril Moi have claimed that Irigaray's work is essentialist and falls back upon metaphysical idealism.³⁷ Diana Fuss comes to Irigaray's defence over these criticisms, arguing that her use of essentialism is a strategic operation, and that like the claims that Irigaray mimics those she is meant to critique (Freud and Lacan), these objections are based on a fundamental misreading of her project.³⁸ In the same manner, Margaret Whitford explains that Irigaray uses psychoanalysis to analyse psychoanalysis: what lies in 'its'

³⁴ Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 47.

³⁵ Ginette Vincendeau, 'Romance,' *Sight & Sound* 9, no. 11 (1999): 52.

³⁶ Dorothy Leland, 'Lacanian Psychoanalysis and French Feminism: Toward an Adequate Political Psychology,' *Hypatia* 3, no. 3 (Winter, 1989): 81-103.

³⁷ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1985).

³⁸ Diana Fuss, "'Essentially Speaking': Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence,' *Hypatia* 3, no. 3 (Winter 1988): 62-80. See also Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

(or Freud's) unconscious and its phantasies. Irigaray is not trying to offer just an alternative to the system, but instead is interrogating the current system. This is necessary, for as Whitford explains, to move from a system of sameness (the manner in which Freud and Lacan structure the world) to one of multiplicity (such as Derrida suggests) "bypasses the possibility of the position of woman-as-subject".³⁹ Breillat and Irigaray are united as their respective projects are not attempts to depict a new form of female sexuality, but instead one that works from within the confines of patriarchal law, deconstructing its conception of femininity and maternity. Like Irigaray in her ironic mimicry of phallogocentric psychoanalytic theory, Breillat's female protagonists embody patriarchal conceptions of femininity to such an extent that they corrupt the image that has been created, and by doing so, clear a ground for woman-as-subject.

Breillat claims that immediately after finishing *Romance* she felt the need to make the film again, and in 2004 she accomplished this desire with *Anatomy of Hell*.⁴⁰ Whereas Marie embodied the patriarchal ideal woman in order to critique it, the woman in *Anatomy of Hell* brings this ideal to the point of rupture. The film is an essay on how the female reproductive body is made abject, and a treatise on the way that male society has constructed the feminine. In an interview in the DVD extras to *Anatomy of Hell* Breillat claims that in the film she wanted to return to the origin of the world. She wanted to keep the film abstract so that it would feel like a legend or myth, the first man and the first woman. In an interview with Kevin Murphy Breillat continues on this point:

We are constantly watching ourselves and aware of the fact that society is always watching us, but the difficulty lies in the attempt to see ourselves in a different way than we are envisaged by society... This woman is

³⁹ Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 83.

⁴⁰ Laurent Goumarre, 'Catherine Breillat: Double Remake,' *Art Press* 272 (2001): 58-59.

paying this man to be the first guy on earth to look at her. They recreate the first night and the first woman, like Adam and Eve.⁴¹

However, it could be argued that these characters are not like Adam and Eve in the traditional sense, as the woman's discussion of her body revolves around the patriarchal misrepresentation of it. Instead they become the first man and the first woman in a post-patriarchal world that offers the position for woman-as-subject, reuniting the mythical with the biological. The death of the woman at the end of the film is symbolic, she has fulfilled her task by rupturing the phallogentric vision of woman that can only see her as an abject orifice to be filled by the penis, enabling the man to consider women differently.

Breillat explores the taboo of menstrual blood in this film, positioning it as a symbol of the fertility of women, and their subjugation. On their third night together the woman gets the man to remove her tampon and as she takes it from him and regards it she says: "Because of this blood, they say we're impure. Sometimes they won't shake our hands. And no intercourse during the period they call our period. In fact they're scared of this blood that flows without the need for a wound". She takes the tampon, placing it in a glass of water, and in a mockery of both the Jewish mikvah and Christian communion, she asks him to drink. When they have both drunk from the glass she inserts another tampon into her vagina. She explains how the tampon has been designed so that a woman does not need to touch herself, so that she can gain no pleasure from the experience, no knowledge of her body and to keep her virginity in tact. As she speaks these words her expression seems to contradict them, as she appears to be enjoying the act, as though engaged in an act of sexual pleasure. "I don't feel a thing" she says, looking as though at the point of orgasm, "Nothing!" Her

⁴¹ Kevin Murphy, 'Hell's Angels: An Interview with Catherine Breillat on *Anatomy of Hell*,' *Senses of Cinema* 34 (February 2005): no pagination, accessed September 1, 2015, http://sensesofcinema.com/2005/on-recent-films-34/breillat_interview.

expression instantly changes to one of blank resignation, revealing her deceptive charade.



Figure 2.3: ‘The man’ inspects the visual sign of a woman’s activity in the creation of life in *Anatomy of Hell*

This scene can be read as a critique of the patriarchal construction of femininity in two ways. Firstly, by arguing that penetration in itself does not equal pleasure for the woman brings into question Freud’s argument that women must renounce clitoral pleasure and move over to the vagina as the primary erotogenic zone in order to enter femininity. The patriarchal focus on penetration in the sex act is a focus on the pleasure of man that ignores female stimulation. It reinforces the idea that sex is about male activity and therefore allows patriarchy to stamp its name on the potential products of that union. Further to this, this scene questions the representation of woman as void. The presence of menstrual blood shows the activity of women in the act of reproduction, it is her product that is as necessary as sperm for the procreation of the species, what the woman calls “the fertile blood of women”.

The woman’s constant request that the man watch her where she is unwatchable could be seen as a call to view women in a way that rejects the flatness of Freud’s two-dimensional mirror. This is exactly what he proceeds to do through an exploration of the inside of her body by penetrating it with various objects and body parts throughout the film. Further to this, the presence of her menstrual blood

provides proof of her activity in the procreative process. She cannot lack, as she creates her own individual fluid that is necessary for this production, the blood that lines the inside of the womb, without which the cells that form the foetus could not survive. By stressing the active role that women play in the reproductive process, the woman debases the ideal of the pure (or virginal) mythic maternal. It is a critique of the male phantasy of origin that demands a passive and powerless construction of the feminine and the maternal. By making the mother's only links to the origin of life mythical, patriarchal society takes away any potential power that women hold. Through the appropriation of such origins, it is able to perpetuate a disavowal of the biological role of motherhood and instead create an ideal of maternity that causes a woman to lose touch with her own body, desires and pleasures. This mythical maternal, devoid of its physical presence and therefore position as point of origin, reflects Freud's phallogentric conception of the womb phantasy as one of Oedipal sexual desire. The actual body of the mother can only be desired as a passive void to be penetrated, rather than the place from which the subject was born, one that symbolises the primary love and care that enabled the development of the self.

Throughout her work, but most predominantly in *A Real Young Girl*, *Romance* and *Anatomy of Hell*, Breillat has explored the female body and all its mythical and biological intricacies. Like the woman in *Anatomy of Hell* she demands that her audience watch what is normally unwatched, what is hidden, oppressed and repressed by patriarchal society. Akin to Irigaray, Breillat operates using the language of that society, her characters exploring their own shame and finding pleasure in the taboos that are thrust upon them by patriarchy. Although this focus on female sexuality is synonymous with Breillat's career, what is less discussed is the importance of maternity to this exploration. Her work allows for an engagement with the

ridiculousness of the Freudian Oedipal story that suggests a woman should deny her own pleasure, and how she is split in two: the mythical maternal and the biological mother. Breillat's work has allowed for an exploration of this split in terms of the patriarchal construction of femininity and the mythicising of the maternal. In order to interrogate this binary further, I will now turn to the work of Julia Kristeva and two French horror films, to focus on the abject biological side of this divide, and the ramifications that the physical body of the mother has on the womb phantasy.

The Two-Faced Mother: Kristeva and the Abject Womb in French Horror Cinema

In her analysis of the work of Louis-Ferdinand Céline in *Powers of Horror* Julia Kristeva writes that in the author's work the mother has two faces. On one side she is the ideal: beautiful and loving. Yet her other face is one of masochistic suffering and illness, one that sacrifices herself for her child. This wretched face is repulsive, deadly and abject, yet also fascinating as the abject always is. Kristeva writes:

Giving life – snatching life away: the Célinian mother is Janus-faced, she married beauty and death... she is also the black power who points to the ephemeral nature of sublimation and the unrelenting end of life, the death of man.⁴²

As the mother is split in two, she remains continually on the border of good and bad, between psychosis and Symbolic law, alterity and kinship. These two faces can be seen to be the two sides of motherhood discussed in the previous section. Although Kristeva uses the terms sublime and abject, her theory – somewhat problematically – aligns with and perpetuates the split between the biological body of the mother and the mythical maternal that this thesis reads into Freudian theory and patriarchal society. The mythical maternal is the sublime and beautiful loving figure, and the

⁴² Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 161.

biological mother is the abject female reproductive body, that would, if one were to follow Kristeva's point of view, point towards the end of life in a manner akin to the death drive. At the same time, during pregnancy the woman is also positioned on a border. From the moment of conception she is no longer one but two, for the child that is growing in her womb is same and *other*. Trapped forever on these borders, Kristeva sees no other option for the mother than for her to embrace her own abjectivity.

This section will use Kristeva's work on the mother-child bond to explore the relationship between the womb, pregnancy and the abject. Continuing the discussion of the womb as a point of origin I argue here that the motif of the pregnant protagonist in two French horror films – *À l'intérieur* (Inside, Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo 2007) and *Frontière(s)* (*Frontier(s)*, Xavier Gens, 2007) – allows for a working through on screen of the two faces of the mother. Simultaneously, my analysis of these films will provide a counter-reading to Kristeva's discussion of the mother's abject residency of borders, entailing the need for her child to reject her in order to enter into patriarchal society. The critical engagement with Kristeva presented here will take issue with the ultimately powerless mythical maternal, and will instead propose that the figure of the pregnant protagonist (as a new form of 'Final Girl') allows for a progressive reading of a positive mother figure that embraces her own abjectivity and subverts patriarchy from within. These gory depictions of bodies under attack are also narratives of maternal love and strength, and therefore re-align the mythical maternal and biological mother in an empowering move.

Since French horror cinema began to experience a rebirth in 2003, the figure of the mother and theme of the maternal has been a constant presence in these works. For

example, Pascal Laugier's *Saint Ange* (*House of Voices*, 2004) features a young pregnant woman who takes a job in a haunted orphanage, whilst in *La meute* (*The Pack*, Franck Richard, 2010) the antagonist is a mother known only as La Spack, who is capturing travellers in rural France and feeding them to her mutant children. More recently, Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury's *Aux yeux des vivants* (*Among the Living*, 2014) opens with a scene where a pregnant mother stabs herself in the stomach in order to kill the child in her womb who has been infected with a virus that will turn it into a deformed killer.

Guy Austin has connected this focus on the maternal body in French horror with the country's historic concerns over depopulation and ideas of nationhood, arguing how "birth and maternity have remained central to the expression of national identity".⁴³ Austin explains that the iconography of motherhood has been used at various points in French history, owing partly to the country's Catholicism. He contends that contemporary French horror portrays a biological dystopia, of which fears surrounding motherhood sit side by side with anxieties regarding cloning and the loss of bodily identity. Yet in contrast to Austin I propose that what could be considered even more relevant to these depictions of motherhood is the French political climate during this period. The rise in production of these horror films coincided with growing concerns over immigration, and the domination the UMP – the Union pour un mouvement populaire – in French politics from 2002 to 2012. The UMP were a centre-right to right-wing party that attempted to unite Gaulism, Christian democracy, conservatism and liberalism, and at times adopted a tough and nationalistic approach to immigration. This was partly a tactic to win over voters from the Front national, France's far-right party, which was receiving growing support prior to this period

⁴³ Austin, 'Biological Dystopias,' 106.

(and after a lull during the early part of Twenty-first Century has since been winning widespread – if not controversial – support across France). So at the same time that questions of nationality and the immigrant *other* were central to French politics, French horror cinema was producing works that overtly featured mother-characters, particularly pregnant women under attack. This has led to scholars such as Ben McCann and Marc Olivier arguing that in these works the body of the mother acts as a stand-in for the body of France, coming under assault from an outside force.⁴⁴ However, I find this reading problematic as it fails to take into account the role of first and second-generation immigrants in these works, both in front of and behind the camera. Instead, I believe that these films reflect as much a fear of the racist white self (the Franco-French population that is providing ever increasing support for the Front national), as it does of the invading ethnic *other*. The mothers in these films are not always white French citizens, nor are they always the protagonists, but what they do embody is a sense of maternal love – however corrupt – and a combination of the abjectivity of bloody violence with the mythical adoration of their child. Therefore, I propose that although mother and nation are aligned in these works, this should be read as a metaphor for a more generalised sense of self and *other*, as opposed to white France under attack.

Although full discussion of the importance of ethnicity and nationhood to contemporary French horror cinema is beyond the scope of this thesis, this political and social context does potentially show why the figure of the mother is a key archetype during this period. The mother is the first experience of *otherness*. Not only are mother and child first one during gestation, and then two after birth, but also as the child begins the process of leaving the symbiotic union it gains its first conscious

⁴⁴ McCann, 'Pierced Bodies,' 225-237; Olivier, 'Border Horror,' no pagination.

experience of self and *other*, which will then be continually re-experienced throughout life. Through the character of the mother these films recall this initial experience of self and *other* as they explore wider questions of race and nationhood. What is also pertinent to the research aims of this thesis, is the combination in these horror films of the biological body that comes under or delivers a brutal attack, and the mythical loving maternal embodied in a character willing to do anything to save her child, regardless of her ethnicity. Further to this, it could be proposed that a number of these works actually encourage cross-ethnic identification through the character of the mother as a universal figure who embodies certain universal traits, namely maternal love and devotion. It is the desire to be loved by such a mother, to be the recipient of such an all-encompassing care, which is at the heart of the womb phantasy.

In order for the mothers in these works to be able display such love towards their children, they must first come under some form of challenge. It is through this challenge where the abject biological ‘horror’ of the reproductive female body is portrayed. In Kristeva’s writing the abject is not an object or subject, rather it is a border or ambiguity that draws the self towards “the place where meaning collapses”.⁴⁵ What crosses borders is in itself abject. Food, faeces, vomit, the sight of bodily organs that should be ‘inside’. The dead body – that which has crossed over the border of life – is the truest form of abjection as it reveals life as also being on a border. Kristeva writes: “If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything.”⁴⁶ The maternal body is abject too, as it has given birth to a child, creating two from one, as well as being the border between

⁴⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

pre-life (gestation) and life itself. Phil Powrie proposes that the abject “is a liminal state, an in-between, poised on the cusp of subject-hood, but not quite yet subjecthood”.⁴⁷ In this sense the womb – and the symbiotic relationship between mother and child that follows it – has links to the abject as the child is a subject-to-be; it is the site where the child is not yet *other*, but also *not quite* mother.

Much of Kristeva’s work on the maternal focuses on the pre-Oedipal relationship between mother and child. This stage, before the self-awareness of Lacan’s mirror (mis)recognition, is described by Kristeva as the *chora* (Plato’s womb-like receptacle), a space before Paternal Law:

The *chora* is a womb or a nurse in which elements are without identity and without reason. The *chora* is a *place* of a *chaos* which *is* and which *becomes*, preliminary to the constitution of the first measurable body... the *chora* plays with the body of the mother – of woman – but in the signifying process.⁴⁸

Within the *chora* the child believes that it is one with the mother, a symbiotic union. In contrast to the Symbolic, which is defined by language, Kristeva argues that the pre-Oedipal period is expressed through the semiotic. The child – existing in a pre-linguistic state – is controlled by a series of drives, with the mother providing the necessary emotional, physical and sustaining relief of those needs. This semiotic state must be repressed in order for the child to enter into the Symbolic. Kristeva believes that in order for the child to leave its state of symbiosis with the mother it must make her abject. The child must break free from the *chora* and move from drives to language and Patriarchal Law in order for its ego to be established. The pleasures associated with the *chora* and the primary drives of the child – defecation, urination, suckling and even the pleasure of unity with the mother’s body – must be repressed as they threaten to destabilise notions of order in the Imaginary that are imposed by the

⁴⁷ Phil Powrie, ‘The W/whole and the Abject,’ *Paragraph* 26, no. 1-2 (2002): 223.

⁴⁸ Julia Kristeva, ‘Le sujet en procès’ cited in and translated by Kelly Oliver, ‘Kristeva’s Imaginary Father and the Crisis in the Paternal Function,’ *Diacritics* 21, no. 2/3 (Summer - Autumn 1991): 46.

Symbolic. Kristeva argues that the pre-Oedipal mother, as regulator of these drives and controller of the child's boundaries through feeding and cleaning, must therefore be repressed as well. By making the mother abject the child is able to distance itself from her, yet simultaneously this makes the child abject, as they have come from the mother. This creates a problem for the child.

Kristeva believes that the male child must split his mother in two so that he can break identification with her and enter into the Symbolic law of patriarchy and become a man. The male child must regard the mother as abject so that he can reject her, but also as sublime (or mythical), and thereby free himself from being labelled as abject and transform his mother into an object so that he can establish an Oedipal desire for her. Kristeva argues that if the mother were only abject, then the male child would be abject too and would not be able to desire her, whereas if she were considered only to be sublime, the identification would not be broken and mother and child would stay in a symbiotic relationship, leading to psychosis. In the case of the female child, Kristeva contends that as they do not need to take the mother as a sexual object they can regard her simply as abject.

However, Kristeva argues that this repression of the pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother is never fully complete, and that the semiotic reappears in poetic language, and in the moments where within language, meaningless physicality, silence and other disruptions, interrupt. Judith Butler notes that Kristeva draws a clear link between the maternal and poetic language:

For Kristeva, the semiotic expresses that original libidinal multiplicity within the very terms of culture, more precisely, within poetic language in which multiple meanings and semantic non-closure prevail. In effect, poetic language is the recovery of the maternal body within the terms of language, one that has the power to disrupt, subvert, and displace the paternal law.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Judith Butler, 'The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva,' *Hypatia* 3, no. 3 (Winter 1989): 105.

Could it not also be argued that the same applies to cinema, and in particular the horror genre? If horror provides the most direct route for the 'return of the repressed', this would suggest that it also lends itself to the semiotic. Although it can be argued that much of horror cinema is deeply misogynistic and therefore bolsters Patriarchal Law, as will be proposed throughout this thesis there are slippages and disruptions relating to the maternal that act as symptoms of the repressed desire to return to the symbiotic union, symbolised by the womb. These symptoms counter the Symbolic and present a challenge to the idea that a full rejection of the symbiotic union is possible. I propose that this can be explored through depiction of the pregnant protagonist in *Inside* and *Frontier(s)*. These two films feature maternal characters that hold the potential to bring together the two sides of the maternal (the mythical and the abject biological) and show a mother's willingness to go to any length to save her child.



Figures 2.4 and 2.5: The mother as abject border in *Inside*

In *Inside* the audience is presented with a mother who will do anything to protect her child, even if that means sacrificing her own life. At the beginning of the film, still traumatised and mourning the loss of her husband after his death, Sarah appears not at all excited about the birth of her unborn child. Her personality reflects the cold, harsh suburbia that surrounds her, the colour palate of the outside world in the film filled with greys and blues. When Sarah enters her house the high-key lighting of the

outside transitions into a warm wash of yellows and reds. Her home is her sanctuary, symbolically womb-like in its colour and soft furnishings. But this metaphysical womb, like her biological womb, is about to be invaded. The unnamed woman who enters into Sarah's home can also be seen as a maternal figure. It is not as simple as to say that the two opposing maternal characters in *Inside* represent either side of the maternal split into biological and mythical. Instead, these two characters show how these two sides are tied up within one figure, with both characters demonstrating the two positions. Sarah's biological body is rendered abject through attack and birth. Her 'insides' are now outside of her body in the penultimate shot where the audience is shown her body lying on the stairs, devoid of life and with the stomach and womb torn open. However, she is also the mythical loving maternal. She gave up her life for her child, she fought for as long as she could and made the ultimate sacrifice.

Sarah's attacker also represents the abject and mythical mother. She too grows more abject as the narrative progresses, not just through the injuries that she has sustained fighting Sarah, but also her personality too. In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva writes that the abject occurs where man moves towards animalism, and this is the direction in which the woman travels.⁵⁰ As her battle against Sarah continues she becomes more primal and animal-like, at one point near the end of the film crouching over Sarah and licking and biting her. Yet Sarah's own reaction to this strange, almost sexual assault is to respond in a similar manner. She lunges and attacks the woman, biting her face.

Although the unnamed woman's crimes and her behaviour mark her as abject, she is loving too. She is avenging the death of her own unborn child, a child that she loved truly and deeply. At the beginning of the film the very first shot is of a foetus in-utero. A voiceover announces: "My baby, finally inside me, no one will take him from me.

⁵⁰ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12-13.

No one can hurt him now. No one.” But these words are followed by the sound of a car crash and the vision of the baby being thrown about as the amniotic fluid turns red with blood. The audience is led to believe that this is Sarah’s baby, and that it is her muffled voice. However at the climax of the film in a flash back the audience is shown that it is the woman’s child who was killed and her voice speaking to him (Sarah is expecting a girl). The woman was once the mythical mother, who has been made abject through the death of her child. Sarah on the other hand, has been made mythical through enabling the birth of hers. Yet it is important to note that instead of empowering these women through their inhabitation of both the mythical maternal and biological abject mother, this has led to their destruction. *Inside* is not the only French horror film of the period to depict such a split in maternity and the ravaging of the pregnant female body. *Frontier(s)* also features a pregnant protagonist, as well as two maternal characters that possess both the abject and the sublime faces of maternity.

Whereas *Inside* is a horrific take on the format of the home-invasion film that was popular during this period in France, *Frontier(s)* instead looks to the trope of the *cinéma rural* film, which depicts people from the city going to the countryside and learning something about themselves during the experience. Protagonist Yasmin’s battle is long and gruesome, and by the end of the film her shorn head and blood-drenched body and face are almost unrecognisable. But unlike Sarah she has survived.



Figure 2.6: Yasmin embraces her inner abjectivity in *Frontier(s)*

There are many similarities between *Inside* and *Frontier(s)*, which were released in the same year. Both films are also set against a background of rioting. The directors of the films have re-appropriated found footage from the 2005 French riots, when mainly second-generation young immigrants took to the streets following the death of two teenagers and the injury of a third after they were chased by the police. Some of the same shots are used in both films, but whereas in *Inside* Sarah dismisses the riots as just a few kids burning cars, in *Frontier(s)* the found-footage is used to portray a nation at war with its government, with images of people protesting eventually leading to the public being attacked by the police as it is announced that a far-right party has won the general election.

This content of this found-footage draws a connection between the pregnant protagonists of these two films and the idea of a country reacting to an increasing migrant population, playing out wider social issues through the medium of the maternal body. The titles of the two films suggest both geographical borders and the borders of the body. *Inside* and *Frontier(s)* are two films that continually seek to expose such borders, to reveal what is on the inside, and to stretch and tear through the boundary of the frontier. I propose that this argument can be taken even further, with the pregnancy of Sarah and Yasmin suggesting that it is the womb that is also

brought to mind when considering these borders, as the mother's body is the first border that is crossed as the child moves from inside to outside.

Each film opens with an image of a foetus in-utero, positioning pregnancy as a key theme right from the start. Both films also feature two mother figures. In *Frontier(s)*, along with the pregnant Yasmin, Eva is also a mother. After being kidnapped by the monstrous family as a child she was married to one of the group and produced three children with him, all horribly physically deformed. These children were sent to live in the mine below the house, feeding off the carcasses of the family's victims. Although Eva has 'failed' as a mother, producing children who did not live up to the standards of her dominating patriarch, she is a loving parent who refuses to leave her children even after everyone else has been killed. She assists Yasmin in her battle, killing members of her own adopted family in order to save this newcomer and her unborn child from the same fate that she suffered. The two young women bond over their shared maternity and a sense of being outsiders, dragged into a patriarchal group where they are subordinate to all others.⁵¹

The defining feature that distinguishes *Inside* and *Frontier(s)* is the character of the pregnant protagonist fighting to save her unborn child. In her article 'A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident' Kristeva writes:

If pregnancy is a threshold between nature and culture, maternity is a bridge between singularity and ethics. Through the events of her life, a

⁵¹ Importantly, Eva's offspring, like those of Le Spack's mutant children in *The Pack*, are uncontrollable cannibal freaks, and in the case of *Frontier(s)* this is seen as a direct result of the abhorrent and abnormal behaviour of their wider family. Supporting my proposal that these films display a fear of the white self as much as the ethnic *other*, across contemporary French horror cinema the countryside is depicted as being inhabited by inbred and often cannibalistic groups of white yokels. The lack of diversity in these social groups is represented as creating a population willing to consume itself both sexually and as food, creating a stagnant and mutated gene pool. In the case of *Frontier(s)* the father of the group is actually German rather than French, yet in the context of the narrative this can be seen as not separating the family's violent and cannibalistic behaviour from that of the French society, but instead to be read as a warning about the direction that France itself is heading in with the rise of far-right political support.

woman thus finds herself at the pivot of sociality – she is at once the guarantee and a threat to its stability.⁵²

In the same manner that the mother has two faces – abject and sublime – Kristeva contends that a woman's pregnancy is both a sign of her un-acceptance into patriarchal society and also the very means by which that society is perpetuated. Kristeva argues that through pregnancy and the subsequent love for her child, the mother is able to build an ethical relationship with an *other* that would otherwise be impossible for her to access under Symbolic law. Kristeva also sees pregnancy as an 'institutionalised psychosis' – an ambiguous position where the self is also the location of an/the other. This creates disorder within the Symbolic with regard to how the mother should be positioned. If she is completely outside of the Symbolic then how can it exist, as the men who formed its Law were born from chaos that is woman? Instead, in Kristeva's view, the mother must be split in two – abject and sublime – so that Symbolic law can be perpetuated, and the role of the mother subdued. However, Kristeva also argues that through pregnancy the mother has to the power to subvert the Symbolic. Pregnancy allows for a relationship with an other that is not the phallus, but a self-made *other*. As Oliver writes on Kristeva's view of the mother and her child:

This other is not yet autonomous; it depends on the subject. As such, it threatens the 'almightiness' of the Symbolic, which requires an autonomous and inaccessible Other... The mother, however, gains access to what is off-limits. She 'knows' better. She knows that there is no transcendent Other, no phallus. The other is the flesh of her flesh – natural, loved.⁵³

Even with this belief in mind, in Kristeva's view the mother's love for her child encourages her to push her child towards the Symbolic and away from symbiosis. By

⁵² Julia Kristeva, 'A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident,' in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 297.

⁵³ Oliver, 'Kristeva's Imaginary Father,' 60.

saving her child from potential psychosis that the symbiotic relationship is believed to present, the mother perpetuates the Symbolic law that marks her body as abject.

Kristeva's analysis of the maternal and the relationship between women and psychosis is highly problematic. Leland argues that Kristevan theory is inherently pessimistic, as it fails to comprehend a way that women could break free from the confines of patriarchy.⁵⁴ Leland contends that like Lacan, Kristeva is bound by the belief in the irrefutable and universal 'truth' of the Oedipus complex, refusing to consider any possibility that it may be rejected. Butler also levies charges of homophobia against Kristeva, for her view that lesbian relationships suffer the same psychosis that threatens the continuation of the mother-child bond. Butler argues that because Kristeva accepts Lacan's heterosexist theory of culture as absolute, the lesbian can only ever be *other* in this construct. She writes: "Kristeva clearly takes heterosexuality to be prerequisite to kinship and to culture. Consequently, she identifies lesbian experience as the psychotic alternative to the acceptance of paternally sanctioned laws".⁵⁵ Butler argues that even though the maternal body and mother-child bond, like poetic language, can be seen to be a source of cultural subversion, it ultimately still succumbs to patriarchal law. It is only ever active when it is *counter* to culture and therefore does not really pose a threat to it. In response Butler states that any subversion must come from within culture itself, as only then will "the culturally constructed body... be liberated, not to its 'natural' past nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities".⁵⁶ Therefore Kristeva's theory of the need for the mother to make herself abject to save her child from psychosis repeats the problematic split in Freudian psychoanalysis and patriarchal culture of the biological mother and the mythical maternal. I propose that

⁵⁴ Leland, 'Lacanian Psychoanalysis and French Feminism,' 98.

⁵⁵ Butler, 'The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva,' 111.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

in the figure of Yasmin there is the potential for these two sides of the maternal to be realigned, and for the mother to use her position as a border to subvert patriarchal culture from within, as Butler suggests.

Yasmin embraces her own abjectivity, and through her willingness to engage in violence – to be covered in blood and become animalistic – she is able to destroy the people who have put her in that position. She is the embodiment of the loving and self-sacrificing mother, willing to do anything to save her child, but unlike Sarah, she does not need to give her own life in order to do this. She is an outsider drawn into a situation in which she could end up being powerless (like Eva), but instead she fights them on their own terms, and wins. Simultaneously, her ethnicity works as a positive counter against the increasingly fraught political climate in France at the time of the film's release. As a mother she stands for one of the fundamental universal certainties: that all humans are born from woman. This relationship forms the psyche's introduction into selfhood through a relationship with an *other* that is positive, loving and nurturing (in the majority of cases). Although the act of mothering may be culturally specific, the fact that women give birth is one of the few constants across humanity. Therefore Yasmin – at a time when immigration and race were at the fore of French politics and social consciousness – can be read as a progressive character inviting positive associations and cross-cultural identification. Although her battered and bruised body may be abject, she defends her unborn child and comes out victorious. She is the protective mother desired in the womb phantasy.

In conclusion, Kristeva's conception of the break from the symbiotic union is highly open to critique, as she proposes that the mother must make herself abject in order to push her child away from her out into the Symbolic. Kristeva's theory recalls Freud's own problematic view that the primary love for the mother is eradicated during the

Oedipus complex, and that she is rejected by her child for either not having a penis like her son, or for not giving one to her daughter. This would reinforce Freud's phallogocentric view of the womb phantasy, and although Kristeva does stress the importance of the pre-Oedipal period of symbiosis between mother and infant, she argues that this relationship must be rejected in order for the child to enter into the Symbolic. However, it can be proposed that the representation of the mother in contemporary French horror cinema counters Kristeva's view by proving that the mother has not been totally rejected, and that there is potential for her two faces to be realigned. Further to this, these films actually reinforce the importance of the early symbiotic relationship between mother and child, as the initial experience of self and other that will form the basis on which other human interactions are built. This initial experience is then reiterated through questions of nationhood and *other*, all played out through the body of the pregnant protagonist under attack. I will now turn to the work of Didier Anzieu to continue to explore how this initial relationship between mother and child shapes the formation of the psyche and the experience of self and other. In contrast to Kristeva, in Anzieu's theory of the Skin Ego not only is the love for the mother saved from annihilation, but also the mother-child bond is seen as integral to the formation of the psyche and remains forever embedded in the unconscious.

The Touch of the Mother: Didier Anzieu and the Skin Ego

In an interview with François Ozon published on his website the director explains why many of his earlier films feature female antagonists: "I enjoy giving to female characters that same cruelty normally seen in men. Feminine manipulation is always much stronger, much more exciting. There is a particular sensuality in a woman's

cruelty.”⁵⁷ Ozon’s words give insight into his filmmaking when considered against his 1997 film *See the Sea*. This brutal work helped to establish Ozon as an *enfant terrible* of French filmmaking, as well as raising the profile of one of its actresses who is now a successful director in her own right, Marina de Van. This section will consider the mother-child relationship in *See the Sea* alongside Didier Anzieu’s theory of the Skin Ego, demonstrating how the womb can be seen as a symbol of the dual skin with the mother that is key to both works. Anzieu proposes that the first human ego is brought about through the contact with the mother’s skin in the early stages of infancy, and a primal phantasy of a shared skin that joins mother and child in a symbiotic union.⁵⁸ I propose that Anzieu’s theory of the Skin Ego could be read as a womb phantasy that is free from the phallocentrism of Freudian theory. It is one where the love for the mother does not need to be destroyed or given up, whilst still enabling separation from her in a manner that does not render her abject.

In an interview with Robert Sklar in 2001 Ozon discussed the alignment of the filmmakers considered to be part of the New French Extremism as something that exists only outside of France, arguing that French critics would find it difficult to group such varied films together. Nevertheless, Ozon explains how he does see himself alongside such other directors as No   and Breillat through their decision to represent sexuality in a way that has not been seen before in France. “It was a way to break something” clarifies Ozon, “[a]nd maybe to accept that French cinema could be

⁵⁷ ‘Interview with Fran  ois Ozon,’ Fran  ois Ozon: Le Site Officiel, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://www.francois-ozon.com/en/interviews-criminal-lovers/74-interview-starfix>.

⁵⁸ Didier Anzieu, ‘Le Moi-peau’, *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse* 9 (1974): 195-203 (in French); Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego: A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Self*, [1985] trans. Chris Turner (London: Yale University Press, 1989). In *The Skin Ego* Anzieu notes that the analyst Esther Bick, who was part of the British Object Relations school, produced a similar theory of a Skin Ego to his prior to his own research, but that he was not aware of it until after he had formulated his own theory. See: Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 193-197; and Esther Bick, ‘The Experience of Skin in Early Object Relations,’ *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 49, (1968): 484-486.

closer to gore movies, not only to the traditions of New Wave or classical movies.”⁵⁹ Ozon was one of the directors that Quandt labelled as “wilfully transgressive”,⁶⁰ and who Richard Falcon in a piece for *Sight & Sound* discusses alongside Noé and Lars Von Trier as sharing “an aggressive desire to confront their audiences, to render the spectator's experience problematic”.⁶¹ However, in his response eight years later to the debate sparked by his original essay Quandt has admitted that with the release of *Sous le sable* (*Under the Sand*, François Ozon, 2000) Ozon was showing his departure from his more extreme earlier works. Quandt argues that *Under the Sand* is a more ‘mature’ work, suggesting therefore that the three of Ozon’s earlier films that were discussed in ‘Flesh and Blood’ – *See the Sea, Sitcom* (François Ozon, 1998) and *Les Amants criminels* (*Criminal Lovers*, François Ozon, 1999) – were immature.⁶² This is an opinion shared by Frédéric Bonnaud, who claims to have been in the ‘anti-Ozon camp’ until the release of *Under the Sand*. Bonnaud argues that his dislike for *See the Sea* springs from a “youthful lapse” by the director to feel the need to show a scene where one of the film’s characters cleans her teeth with a toothbrush that another character has wiped in her own excrement.⁶³ The critic argues: “Ozon’s insistence on a logical progression in presenting this repugnant desecration of hygiene is heavy-handed, underlining something that would have been much stronger and smarter had it been passed over in silence.”⁶⁴ But Bonnaud appears to have missed the point. The depiction of the use of the dirtied toothbrush could be seen to do more than just provide an opportunity for provoking a reaction of disgust in the audience; it shows

⁵⁹ Robert Sklar, ‘Sex, Violence, and Power in the Family: An Interview with François Ozon,’ *Cineaste* (Autumn 2005): 49.

⁶⁰ Quandt, ‘Flesh and Blood,’ 127.

⁶¹ Richard Falcon, ‘Reality is too Shocking,’ *Sight & Sound* 9, no.1 (Jan 1999): 10.

⁶² James Quandt, ‘Some More Moralism from that ‘Wordy Fuck’,’ in *The New Extremism in Cinema*, 209-213.

⁶³ Frédéric Bonnaud, ‘François Ozon: Wannabe Auteur Makes Good,’ *Film Comment* 37, no. 4 (July/August 2001): 53.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

the incorporation of one character into another, of a product from one body being absorbed or consumed by someone else. It also sits within the wider context of the production of visually excessive films of this period that focused on such corporeal breaking of boundaries. It is such boundaries – specifically those of the maternal body – that are the focus of Ozon’s provocative film.



Figure 2.7: Skin-on-skin contact between mother and daughter in *See the Sea*

As the title of *See the Sea* suggests, the setting of the narrative at a coastal location is key to this work. The beach allows for activities that reveal the skin under clothes, accentuating skin-to-skin contact between mother and child. The waves that lap against the shore mirror Sasha’s caressing of her daughter Sioffra, although they could also be seen to represent something more threatening, an impending violence. Fiona Handyside argues that beaches are a motif in Ozon’s work that encourage a queer reading as they are transformative sites “where the body’s relationship to time and space is (constantly) reconfigured.”⁶⁵ Handyside writes that in *See the Sea* and Ozon’s 2005 film *Le Temps qui reste* (*Time to Leave*, François Ozon, 2005) “the beach is a site of abjection and death, disrupting temporal relations between past, present and future”.⁶⁶ Kate Ince also provides a queer reading of the use of the

⁶⁵ Fiona Handyside, ‘The Possibilities of a Beach: Queerness and François Ozon’s Beaches,’ *Screen* 53, no.1 (Spring 2012): 55.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

beaches in *See the Sea* and another short film of Ozon's, *Une robe d'été* (*Summer Dress*, François Ozon, 1996) arguing that both films feature sex scenes on the fringes of a beach that involve a mismatch of sexual orientation.⁶⁷ In *Summer Dress* a young gay man has sex with a woman, and in *See the Sea* during a visit to the beach Sasha's repressed dissatisfaction with her life comes to the surface and she engages in an act of casual oral sex with a gay man cruising at the beach's edge, whilst Sioffra lies sleeping. However a different relationship could be established in *See the Sea*, between the location of the beach and the maternal. In Freudian terms, the sea and water are seen as symbols of the womb, birth and re-birth, as well as the desire of the person to have a baby.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the film's title plays on the French words for sea (*mer*) and mother (*mère*), instructing the audience to look both at the sea and at the mother, but which one, Sasha or Tatiana?

Throughout the film the sea is linked to the maternal through Ozon's use of shots of the beach to detail aspects of Sasha's life. At the beginning of the film the blue water of the ocean appears as a clean space where mother and child can play together. In contrast to Tatiana who remains heavily clothed whilst on the sand and always in a state of unrest and watchfulness, Sasha seems at home in a summer dress or bikini, the beach being both the location of her holiday and her lonesome imprisonment. Finally when Tatiana kills Sasha, Ozon does not present the audience with the act as it is carried out. Instead the director cuts away to three different shots of the ocean: the first of the water lapping against the shore, red in the morning sun, the second of the water choked with seaweed, and the third of a dead fish and crab on the sand. In these images the sea embodies and reflects Sasha's demise, her skin bloodied and choked by Tatiana's brutal sadism.

⁶⁷ Kate Ince, 'François Ozon's Cinema of Desire,' in *Five Directors: Auteurism from Assayas to Ozon*, ed. Kate Ince (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 126.

⁶⁸ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 399.

Two key themes run through *See the Sea*: the two faces of maternity and the tactile contact between mother and child. As in *Inside*, Sasha and Tatiana represent the patriarchal construct of the dual nature of maternity. In fact the films share many narrative similarities. Both could be considered to be home-invasion films featuring an unknown woman who comes into the life of a mother, commits violent and destructive acts and steals their child. Further to this, there is a sense of a merging together of characters in *Inside* and *See the Sea*. When the films begin, Sarah and the unnamed woman and Sasha and Tatiana appear as opposites to each other, yet as the works continue these two sets of women each appear to combine together. They begin to form two sides of the same person, each reflecting certain qualities of the other. Both films also refuse to name all the characters, which could lead them to be read as universal archetypes as opposed to distinct personalities.⁶⁹ As argued previously, in *Inside* Sarah and the unnamed woman share qualities of the abject and the sublime, the two faces of Kristeva's mother. The same is true for Sasha and Tatiana, although in *See the Sea* the audience is presented with a character (Tatiana) who takes on the life of another (Sasha). Tatiana reveals Sasha's hidden dissatisfaction with motherhood and gradually takes her place. It is as though Tatiana has shed her own dirty and damaged skin and taken on that of Sasha.

Tactility, touch and the skin appear as central visual and theoretical motifs in *See the Sea*. Ozon intersperses the film with images of scenery, water and plant life that are near to abstraction, the stationary camera recording the movement of nature in a manner that reflects the tactile quality of the countryside that surrounds Sasha's home. Sasha herself is always in a constant state of touching. Ozon shows mother and daughter (Sioffra is played by Hails's actual daughter Samantha) carrying out every

⁶⁹ Marina de Van's character is not actually named in *See the Sea*, but was called Tatiana in interviews with Ozon and the actress after its release.

day acts such as bathing, cleaning and feeding. These moments of normality highlight the constant contact between mother and child and the caressing reassurance and engagement that is met with cries of sadness from Sioffra when it is missed. This contact is supported through Sasha's perpetual verbal communication with Sioffra, which attempts to either calm or stimulate her child. If contact is missing and only the voice is used, Sasha's efforts are often rejected by Sioffra. When she is not holding Sioffra, Sasha is still shown continually touching, running her hands across surfaces, fiddling with a book, sifting sand through her fingers or even masturbating with a chair. In many of the scenes where she is in contact with her child there is a focus on skin-on-skin connection. The film shows mother and daughter in the bath together on a number of occasions, as well as depicting moments such as the application of sunscreen, or the cleaning of Sioffra's bottom. Anzieu highlights the importance of such physical contact between mother and child. Like Kristeva, Anzieu contends that the ego is formed through a relationship with the mother's body. However, contrary to her, Anzieu's theory is based on a loving contact with the mother's skin rather than abjection.

Anzieu's work goes against much of psychoanalysis through a turning away from language as the only means of understanding the psyche and instead viewing the body as "the bedrock of the mind".⁷⁰ With reference to Freud's note about how the ego is formed through the surface of the body, Anzieu argues that skin-to-skin contact with the mother (or mothering figure) encourages the first version of the ego in a child, the Skin Ego.⁷¹ Anzieu contends that Freud did not just relate the oral phase to the process and sensation of sucking on the mother's breast, but also to the pleasure of

⁷⁰ Didier Anzieu, *A Skin for Thought: Interviews with Gilbert Tarrab on Psychology and Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 1990), 61.

⁷¹ "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface" Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1923), SE XIX, 26.

repletion that it gave. Simultaneously, the child is pressed against the mother's body, caressed, cleaned and talked or sung to. Anzieu claims that even at a very young age this leads the child to understand their body as both container and surface. He contends that from the start of life the skin has three main functions: firstly it is a sac that contains the comfort and repletion given by the mother, secondly it is a boundary or interface between inside and out, and finally it is a means of communication with others, and moreover, "an 'inscribing surface' for the marks left by those others".⁷² The skin individualises the self, making a person visually distinctive, the marks and scars outwardly showing the history of the person's life. Conversely, Anzieu also argues that the skin is a 'mirror' of the soul, revealing to the outside world the state of the contents that it protects. It is a reflection of biological and psychical health of the person within.⁷³

Anzieu contends that psychoanalysis is different from psycho-physiological or psycho-sociological approaches because it takes into account the role of phantasy as a bridge between the psyche and the body, the world and others. "The Skin Ego is a reality of the order of phantasy" writes Anzieu, "it figures in phantasies, dreams, everyday speech, posture and disturbances of thought; and it provides the imaginary space on which phantasies, dreams, thinking and every form of psychopathological organization are constituted."⁷⁴ Anzieu argues that the original human phantasy is of a common skin with the mother in the first stages of childhood. He believes that from birth the baby is an active member of symbiosis with the mother, interacting with her by creating signals that are responded to. This dyadic relationship between mother

⁷² Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 40.

⁷³ As Kathryn Robson points out, Anzieu's theory of the skin as a marker of what is contained within it could be linked to more problematic issues such as racism. She contends that to counteract this instead of simply reading the skin, it should be approached in relation to the context of how it is being presented. See Kathryn Robson, 'L' Écriture de peau: The Body as Witness in Lorette Nobécourt's *La Démangeaison*,' *Nottingham French Studies* 45, no.3 (Autumn 2006): 69.

⁷⁴ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 4.

and child is one of mutual communication. A key aspect to the phantasy of common skin is that it has layers that enable the *transmission* of messages and a communication with the mother as *other*. As Anzieu writes, “to be an Ego is to feel one has the capacity to send out signals that are received by others”.⁷⁵ Anzieu argues that his form of wordless communication between mother and child is vital for language to be developed. Further to this, this space between the layers of the common skin displays its symmetrical nature as a divide between the two, a precursor to the future separation of mother and child.

Even though the phantasy of a common skin with the mother is largely an enjoyable and reassuring one, it must be surmounted in order for the child to move from a bodily ego to a psychical one. Anzieu argues that this is carried out in normal life through the double prohibition on touching. Anzieu argues that the primary prohibition on touching entails that the child starts to become an individual. The mother begins to wean the child from her breast (or the bottle which also provides a more direct form of contact and embrace during feeding), as well as the decrease in skin-on-skin contact that extends beyond the contact of the hand. This prohibition is directed towards the attachment drive, and Anzieu argues that it is encouraged through social pressure on the mother. The second prohibition applies to the drive of mastery and the desire for the child to learn through touching. The child begins to be told not to do things, notably the touching of objects, or the touching of parts of their own body or the bodies of their parents. Anzieu argues that this second prohibition encourages the acquisition of language: the child must learn to ask for something, or to find out why they have been denied it. Subsequently, the prohibition on touching can be seen as laying the path for the Oedipal prohibition. However, his theories of

⁷⁵ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 62.

the Skin Ego and the following prohibition on touching differ from the Oedipal taboo as they do not require a full renunciation or repression of the primary love object, the mother, but instead only a “renunciation of echotactile communication as the principle mode of communication with others”.⁷⁶ This opens up a potential area for discussion where the love for the mother does not need to be rejected or repressed, and the phantasy of the common skin with her can be more readily reactivated and enjoyed.

I propose that Anzieu’s theory of a phantasy of a common skin with the mother is a form of womb phantasy. This phantasy is grounded in that skin being a sac or container, therefore the childhood phantasy of a common skin with the mother could be considered as a phantasy extension of the period spent in the womb. This presents a way of considering womb phantasies away from Oedipal incestuous desires and instead focusing on the desire to return to the original state of oneness and the comforting embrace of the loving mother. Anzieu’s work presents a womb phantasy that desires the loving mother, whilst still enabling separation from her in a manner that does not render her abject and is free from overtly phallogentric indoctrination. As such, although Anzieu takes Freud as his starting point, the theory of the Skin Ego moves the womb phantasy into new ground for a feminist psychoanalytic reading.

Anzieu contends that the Skin Ego and the primary tactile method of communication used during early infancy, are not destroyed, but instead are:

preserved as a backcloth upon which systems of intersensory correspondences come to be inscribed; they constitute a primary psychical space, into which other sensory and motor spaces may be fitted; they provide an imaginary surface upon which the products of later operations of thought may be set out. Communication at a distance through gestures and subsequently by the spoken word requires not only the acquisition of specific codes, but also the preservation of this original echotactile

⁷⁶ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 153.

backcloth to communication, and its more or less frequent reactivation and re-use.⁷⁷

Therefore the pre-linguistic communication with the mother through tactility is the primordial beginning of human understanding. Although it is repressed, it becomes the screen – or ‘backcloth’ to use Anzieu’s term – onto which all other forms of communication and understanding are projected and made sense of. Like Kristeva’s semiotic it is pre-linguistic, instinctive, subjective and embodied. It is also reliant on the guiding presence of the mother in order to exist. In the same manner that a mother nurtures and shapes the body of her baby through physical care, she controls the development of their psyche and sense of being-in-the-world. Yet in contrast to Kristeva’s work, Anzieu rejects the notion that this bond must be broken in order for the child to develop. Instead this original form of communication with the mother forms the foundation on which all other interactions are built. The mother is positioned as the origin of both the body and the psyche.

In *See the Sea* Sasha and Sioffra demonstrate the active communication in the phantasy of the common skin. The film is particularly insightful in discussing Anzieu’s theory as it shows a real mother-child relationship, therefore the child’s reactions and emotions are truthful. In the opening scene of the film where a hungry Sioffra wakes Sasha, the baby’s hands are seen pressing out through the material surface of her travel cot as she reaches out to her mother who at first only offers a verbal response. The walls of her bed act as a barrier between the two that hinders mutual communication between them (each one only able to attract attention using their vocal chords, yet mutual communication is denied due to Sioffra’s pre-linguistic mind). As soon as Sioffra is picked up she clings on tightly to her mother, instantly comforted, and when she is being fed she strokes her own skin with arms interlocked

⁷⁷ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 153.

with her mother's. The act of stroking her own skin shows that the baby consciously enjoys tactile contact and is able to replicate it when desired. Sioffra (or it should be said Samantha the real baby not the character) has developed a Skin Ego.

Coinciding with the double prohibition on touching is the child's developing ability to distinguish between the two forms of maternal contact: excitatory and signifying. Anzieu argues that signifying contact between mother and child is the touch that communicates. It is the comforting hug, feeding, cleaning or protecting from danger. Some forms of contact from the mother may however induce erogenous stimulation that is too powerful for the yet developed psyche, leading to feelings of trauma. This is excitatory contact. Anzieu contends that at first the child cannot distinguish between these two types of contact, but as they develop that which is excitatory can eventually be labelled as unpleasant as the mother – who was once believed to protect the baby – “produces in the infant through the libidinal quality and intensity of the bodily care and attention she provides an instinctual over-excitation of an internal origin.”⁷⁸ This can lead to the Skin Ego developing as both an envelope of excitation and also one of suffering. Anzieu argues that this is the basis of masochism and its compulsion to repeat both the excitation and the suffering.

See the Sea represents the phantasy of the common skin between mother and child in two different ways. There is the common skin that is accentuated in the constant touching of Sasha as discussed above, but also it is represented through Tatiana's eventual symbolic replacement of Sasha as mother to Sioffra. Tatiana's skin stands as a physical manifestation of the masochistic results of a corrupt Skin Ego. When Sasha offers the use of her bathroom to the interloper the audience is presented with an opportunity to see Tatiana's body that is usually hidden under layers of clothing. Her

⁷⁸ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 43.

skin is bruised, scabbed and scratched, her nails dirty and yellowed. Further to this she begins a process of imparting her layers of imperfection. She masturbates with Sasha's bar of soap, rubbing it over the crotch of the underwear that she is still wearing even in the bath. She also wipes Sasha's toothbrush around her used toilet bowl, leading to Bonnaud's hated scene discussed previously.



Figure 2.8: Tatiana's corrupt Skin Ego

If, as Anzieu argues, the skin can be considered as a mirror or surface projecting the psychological state of the person within, Tatiana's body can be read as a physical sign of her psychosis. Anzieu argues that skin ailments, notably pruritus – or itching – are psychological as well as physiological, caused by stress, emotional turmoil, and critically for Anzieu, “narcissistic flaws and inadequate structuring of the Ego”.⁷⁹ Anzieu argues that itching can be linked to libidinal development, combining sexual pleasure with pain and self-punishment (in order to appease the super-ego). He contends that people who show signs of self-abuse are prone to a dependency that he or she finds unbearable, causing them to react against themselves. Anzieu explains:

He [or she] attempts to turn this dependency around by making dependent on him those persons who replicate the objects towards whom his attachment drive was first directed, objects who in the past were sources of frustration and who have since aroused in him a desire for vengeance.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 32.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

These subjects experience the full force of the attachment drive, suffering from an oscillation of the anxiety of abandonment if their object is seen as too far away, or persecution if it is too close.⁸¹ Therefore, Anzieu is arguing that self-inflicted ailments of the skin represent not only a form of masochistic auto-eroticism and self-punishment, but also a calling to attention of the person's own skin, which in Anzieu's view has not received the correct level of maternal contact needed to establish a healthy Skin Ego, leading to a well-formed adult ego.

These arguments do highlight potential issues with Anzieu's work. Anzieu argues that eczema in children could be seen as the result of a lack of maternal affection. Not only does this blame the mother for what is normally considered to be a physiological condition, but it also goes against modern research on food and other allergies which are now seen to be the common cause of such an illness of the skin. In his discussion with Gilbert Tarrab, Anzieu claims that when a patient is in therapy it is up to the analyst to find words that are "symbolic equivalents of what was missing in the tactile exchanges between the baby and his mother", again putting the emphasis – as the theory of the Skin Ego does as a whole – on his belief that if the mother gets it wrong, then the child pays the price.⁸² Maternity is presented as a doubled-edged sword. It is a relationship that forms the child's body and mind, and provides a closeness that can never be replicated, yet it also welcomes the potential for blame and mistake.

Anzieu's arguments would suggest that Tatiana's actions and her scratched and scarred skin could be a form of masochistic punishment for her inability to keep her child. Whereas Sasha always reaches out to touch that which is not her, reincorporating the *other* into her body, Tatiana's touch remains engaged with her

⁸¹ This oscillation could be considered as a reactivation of the separation-individuation phase theorised by Margaret Mahler, which is the process by which the child leaves the symbiotic union. See Chapter 3 for a further discussion of this phase and its links with Anzieu's work.

⁸² Anzieu, *A Skin for Thought*, 73.

own skin; and the position of her body as the abject site of the death of her unborn baby. Kate Ince argues that Tatiana's dirtiness represents the potential threat she holds towards the clean Sasha, the cuts and scratches on her skin standing in for the damage done to her body during her abortion. Ince reads Tatiana's probing questions that she asks Sasha about Sioffra's birth – did she have an episiotomy? Did she enjoy the pain of giving birth? Where did she tear during the process? – as an admission that her abortion damaged her own body to such an extent that it left her infertile, a story that in Ince's view is too traumatic to tell in the first person. Tatiana informs Sasha that she had heard how childbirth can tear a woman from the vagina to the anus, causing them to produce "some shit out of the pussy after." Ince argues: "Tatiana cannot have any more children, as childbirth has injured her so badly that her reproductive organs have been contaminated by the colon and its dirty, foul-smelling contents".⁸³ This is speculation on Ince's part as Tatiana makes no outright claim to infertility, nor is it likely that a baby born during an abortion would be large enough to produce such tearing, as if carried out legally in France the pregnancy must be terminated within the first twelve weeks after conception. Instead, Tatiana's probing questions could be seen as a disavowal of the joy of childbirth, rendering that which she was unable to do (give birth to a living child) abject and disgusting. The successfully born child is replaced by faeces, with the mother's body being left torn and sullied in its wake. It could then be argued that Tatiana does not steal Sioffra because she is unable to have another child of her own, but because this disavowal of natural childbirth has left her wanting the child that she aborted, yet unwilling to naturally give birth. It could also explain Tatiana's stitching up of Sasha's vagina after killing her, rendering void that which Sasha was able to do (give birth vaginally to a living child).

⁸³ Ince, 'François Ozon's Cinema of Desire,' 128.

The theory of Tatiana's actions and words as a disavowal of natural childbirth could also be linked back to her own corrupt Skin Ego. Anzieu's argument that those with a masochistic relationship to their own skin show signs of an over-dependency on the primary object of their attachment (the mother) and fall into a cycle of desiring that object and pushing it away or punishing it could be applied here. Tatiana desires to be a mother, yet she also punishes Sasha for her own maternity. She courts Sasha, offering friendship and freedom, but simultaneously she teases and provokes her, cruelly dissecting that which she herself desires: motherhood.



Figures 2.9 and 2.10: The contrasting faces of motherhood

Fecundity is just one of the ways in which Sasha and Tatiana oppose each other. Visually the women stand in stark contrast to each other. Unlike Tatiana's scarred and scratched skin, Sasha's body is tanned and healthy. Tatiana is always dressed in heavy, dirty and ripped clothing, whereas Sasha favours summer dresses and bikinis. In the two dinner table scenes Ozon's use of costume and lighting also helps to separate the pair. Sasha wears light clothing and is lit with high-key lighting that creates a warm wash around her. Tatiana on the other hand is dressed in black and lit in a way that only the pale skin of her round face is illuminated. In other sequences their clothing also corresponds to two key womb symbols in the film: Tatiana's tent and a stone tomb. Two sequential scenes are contained in the film that highlight these two external womb symbols and their relation to each woman. The first (that occurs simultaneously to Sasha receiving cunnilingus on the beach) shows Tatiana walking

through a graveyard. Diegetic sounds of a child crying in the background are heard as Tatiana passes through the cemetery, her grey jacket and brown suede overcoat blending in with the moss-covered memorial stones and pebbled ground. Tatiana walks between the tombs until she finds one that is broken and inserts her hand inside, caressing the stonework as the non-diegetic sound of César Franck's *Panis Angelicus* intertwines with the distant sound of the child crying. This piece of music is also played in a scene earlier on in the day where Tatiana walks through a supermarket, lingering over aisles of butchered and packaged raw meat and stacks of nappies. Sarah Cooper argues that both scenes “point eerily to the loss of her own child” revealed later on during the dinner conversation with Sasha.⁸⁴ Tatiana's womb/tomb once full of life, is now empty and cold too.



Figures 2.11 and 2.12: Womb symbolism in *See the Sea*

Immediately after this scene Ozon shows Sasha returning with Sioffra from the beach and her extramarital sexual engagement. The dress that Sasha has chosen to wear that day is burnt orange, matching Tatiana's tent in colour and form – the triangular cut of the top and straps mirroring the peaked entrance to the structure. Attempting to locate her new friend, Sasha crawls into the tent, where the afternoon sun has transformed its interior into a red womb-like space. Once inside the tent Sasha finds Tatiana's diary – letting her into the woman's symbolic body and mind – and

⁸⁴ Sarah Cooper, 'Regarde la mer' DVD liner notes, *François Ozon: Regarde la mer and Other Short Films* DVD (British Film Institute, 2008), 12.

discovers the illness that lies within.⁸⁵ It is in this tent that her husband later discovers Sasha's corpse. Like the grave it has become, both womb and tomb, the previous warm red interior is now dark, saturating Sasha's body in a blood-coloured wash. Again, these two womb/tombs represent the distinction between Sasha's body that was able to give birth to a living child, and the aborted foetus that came from Tatiana's. By killing her and stitching up her vagina, Tatiana has transformed Sasha's reproductive organs from womb to tomb, the former able to give life, the latter sealed (sewn) up.

Tatiana's lack of manners, her abrupt questioning and her abject skin, all mark her as corrupt, whereas Hails's Sasha is naive, beautiful, caring and even innocent in her sexual exploration. Tatiana transfixes Sasha. She appears to trust her instantly and asks her to look after Sioffra even though she has only known the traveller for one night. Yet Sasha's pleasure in motherhood and contentedness in marriage reveals itself to be a façade as she grows easily distracted when playing with Sioffra on the beach, is open to extramarital sex and reminisces longingly about her younger years. Tatiana appears to see this unhappiness in Sasha and uses it to get under her skin, as though the disruption of her life is necessary in order for Tatiana to assume her role. Throughout the film Tatiana slowly incorporates herself into Sasha. As discussed above, the scene where Sasha cleans her teeth with a toothbrush previously wiped in Tatiana's faeces could be seen as the start of the interloper taking on the life or skin of the mother. As the film progresses and Sasha's dissatisfaction with her life rises to the surface, Tatiana becomes more maternal, although it is a maternity tainted with corruption. Tatiana's initial interactions with Sioffra are uncaring: she takes the baby's hat off when she is out in the sun, and does not try to comfort her when Sioffra

⁸⁵ Tatiana's diary is full of mad scribbles and drawings, as well as the name Caroline written over and over again.

cries. Yet after Sasha has left her alone with Sioffra, Tatiana does begin to show a more maternal side, singing to her and playing with her. This melding together of the two characters is accentuated in the two scenes where both women penetrate the corresponding womb-like spaces, and it climaxes later that night when Tatiana enters Sasha's bedroom, strips off her clothes, and kills Sasha. The act of undressing could suggest to the audience that a lesbian encounter is about to take place, but additionally it could be seen to symbolise the shedding of Tatiana's own skin as she takes on that of Sasha. When Tatiana is next shown in the film's final scene not only is she wearing Sasha's orange dress, but she has also taken on her skin as mother to Sioffra.

See the Sea depicts the importance of the maternal touch for both the child and for the mother. This reflects Anzieu's theory of the Skin Ego and his assertions over the significance of contact in the symbiotic period. He believes that the psychical boundary between mother and child is the very first phantasy, and forms the foundation of the child's emerging psyche. If this phantasy of a common skin is grounded in that skin being a sac or container like the womb, I propose that it could also be understood as a phantasy of still being in the womb; drawing the period of symbiosis together with the imagined life in the mother's body. This presents a way of considering womb phantasies away from Oedipal incestuous motives and instead focusing on the desire to return to the original state of oneness and the comforting embrace of the symbiotic union. Anzieu's work presents a womb phantasy that desires the loving mother, whilst still enabling separation from her in a manner that does not render her abject and is free from overtly phallogentric indoctrination. Ozon's female driven narrative also occupies such a site away from such phallogentrism. *See the Sea* communicates using the language and symbolism of the maternal and the womb. Indeed, there is very little masculine about this film. In

Sasha's sexual tryst on the beach she receives oral sex rather than being penetrated, skin and touch is highlighted as a means of communication as much as language, Tatiana strangles and binds her victim rather than entering her body (through a stab wound for example), and the predominant symbolic motifs (the sea, the tent, the tomb, the house, the bathtub) are all womb symbols. Sasha and Tatiana represent the mother's potential to be both loving and deadly, all played out within the confines of a maternally-driven narrative. Therefore *See the Sea* depicts both the possibilities available in Anzieu's theory to move the womb phantasy away from Freud's phallocentrism, but also the pitfalls of such a theory so open to the potential for mother-blame.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how the films of the New French Extremism and recent French horror cinema contain narratives and imagery that explore the position of the mother as the site of the origin of the body and psyche. Through the combination of Irigaray's psychoanalytic theory and the films of Breillat I was able to show that both theorist and director share a project that challenges how the womb is used in the patriarchal construction of femininity and Freud's phallogentric Oedipal narrative. I then turned to the representation of the pregnant protagonist in *Inside* and *Frontier(s)* to further explore the split in the maternal between the abject body of the mother and the mythical maternal, and the role of the mother as first *other*. Finally this chapter looked to Ozon's *See the Sea* to engage with Anzieu's theory of the Skin Ego as a potential means to separate the womb phantasy from Freud's phallogentric master thesis. Key to this chapter has been the role of the womb in split created by patriarchal culture (and visible in Freudian psychoanalysis) between the mythical maternal and

the biological abject body of the mother. Moving from Irigaray's critique of Freud, to my own critical analysis of Kristeva, and finally to a potential alternative provided by Anzieu, this chapter has sort to reinstate the maternal womb and the symbiotic union as the origin of physical and psychical life.

Chapter 3

Monstrous Mothers and the Mother Hero: America

This chapter will explore the symbolic depiction of the maternal womb and the subtextual references to the symbiotic mother-child dyad in modern and postmodern American horror cinema.¹ First it will use modern horror's most famous mothers – Mrs Bates from *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), Mrs Vorhees from *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980) and Mrs White from *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976) – to demonstrate how the representation of these women as devouring mothers acts as a cultural barrier against the desire to return to the symbiotic union by depicting it as dangerous and potentially deadly. It will then turn to three influential haunted house films of this period – *The Amityville Horror* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1979), *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) and *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982) – reading them as depictions of the break from the symbiotic union, a break that is assisted by the mother-hero. I propose that womb symbolism plays a key role in these films, and although they feature positive maternal protagonists they are also ingrained with the necessity to reject the symbolic womb-space of symbiosis and enter patriarchy. Finally, this chapter will look to the recent rebirth of these narratives in contemporary postmodern American horror cinema, using the case study of *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013) to question if the position of the mother, the representation of the maternal, and the occurrence and nature of womb symbolism, has changed in these twenty-first century films. This chapter will engage critically with the work of Karen Horney, Margaret Mahler and Nancy Chodorow, as well as other key figures in

¹ In this chapter American horror cinema will be divided into three periods: classic, modern and postmodern. Classic horror cinema runs from the birth of the genre until 1960, when as will be discussed, Hitchcock's *Psycho* displayed a turn towards the family narratives and local threats that became prevalent in modern horror. The term postmodern is then used in relation to films from 1996 onwards, where the genre was marked with a form of self-reflexivity introduced by the popular film *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996).

American psychoanalysis, to explore how and why the mother is depicted in these films as both monstrous and heroic, whilst simultaneously the maternal is represented as horrific and deadly, but also safe and comforting.

The Great Mistake: Psychoanalysis and America

In her essay on the role of the family and children in modern American horror cinema, Vivian Sobchack argues: “Repression seems the dominant strategy of the traditional horror film. And, as we all know by now, what is repressed returns in condensed and displaced form to threaten and challenge and disrupt that which would deny it presence.”² Psychoanalytic approaches and concepts such as repression are so common in American horror film theory that scholars either use them (whether in passing or conducting specific psychoanalytic analyses) or they go to great lengths to clearly demarcate their work as *not* operating under the framework of psychoanalysis. However, it can be argued that this link between psychoanalysis and horror cinema is not just found in the theoretical work on the genre, but also directly and consciously represented in the films themselves during horror’s ‘modern’ period between 1960 and 1996, with their references to Oedipal desire, castration and the unconscious. In America during the mid-twentieth century psychoanalysis – or rather a simplified version of it – was very much part of mainstream popular culture.

Freud’s disdain for American culture has been widely documented.³ In his youth he had been impressed with the American Constitution and Declaration of Independence – a copy of which he hung above his bed as a young man – but during his visit to the

² Sobchack, ‘Bringing It All Back Home,’ 144.

³ For a detailed review of this material see: Benjamin Brody, ‘Freud’s Analysis of American Culture’, *The Psychoanalytic Review* 63, no. 3 (Fall 1976): 361-377. In his autobiography Ernest Jones laments that Freud was sometimes too subjective in his view of the country and would say such things as “Yes, America is gigantic, but a gigantic mistake”, Freud, quoted in: Ernest Jones, *Free Associations: Memories of a Psychoanalyst* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 181.

country with Jung in 1909 he developed an open dislike for it. In his memoirs Max Eastman recalls that Freud jokingly said to him “I don’t hate America, I regret it... I regret that Columbus ever discovered it!”⁴ During his trip to the country Freud gave five lectures at Clark University, which acted as a catalyst for the growing interest in his work. Even though Freud openly disliked America, America was to become obsessed with Freud and psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis initially entered America via the avant-garde movement of artists and philosophers. John C. Burnham proposes that this could explain the particular version of psychoanalysis that became popular in the country, as he argues that it is a nation that is always seeking the next big thing:

Avant-gardism... had more to do with intellectual stance than with subdivisions of functional social groups, and the first, or avant-garde, stage of psychoanalysis in America was consequently one in which the psychological teachings of Freud rather than psychoanalytic practice dominated.⁵

This manner in which psychoanalytic theory was introduced to the country prior to psychoanalytic practice could be considered as one of the reasons why there was a dialectical relationship between theory and practice in twentieth century America. During World War I psychoanalysis was critiqued in the country by the growing fields of neurology and psychiatry, yet at the same time it was being subsumed into American life through art and culture, spearheaded by the avant-garde interest. As Burnham notes, by the late 1920s “the mythical ‘everyone’, friendly or hostile to psychoanalysis, was supposed to know about repression and the Oedipus complex”.⁶ This familiarity with a number of basic elements of Freudian thought was seen to be harmful by many psychoanalytic practitioners. Clarence Oberndorf, who was one of

⁴ Freud, quoted in Max Eastman, *Einstein, Trotsky, Hemingway, Freud, and Other Great Companions* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 265.

⁵ John C. Burnham, ‘From Avant-Garde to Specialism: Psychoanalysis in America,’ *The Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 15 (1979): 128-129.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

the founding members of the New York Psychoanalytic Society, stressed the need for psychoanalysis to be seen as a science, and argued against lay analysts, calling them quacks.⁷ This led to a divisive split where at once psychoanalysis was at the height of popular interest as a means to understand human mental life and culture, whilst those working in a clinical setting focused instead on the ability of the method to produce clear medical results.

The question of whether to allow lay analysts to practice as certified psychoanalysts was – and still is – an important issue in American psychoanalysis. Until a critical lawsuit in 1987, where five PhD-level psychologists successfully campaigned for the American Psychoanalytic Association (APA) to allow them to enter training, only those who had a medical degree could officially train and practice as a psychoanalyst in the country.⁸ This stipulation was a rarity in international psychoanalysis, as Freud himself not only supported lay analysts, but also actually suggested that a medical background could be detrimental to the therapeutic and investigatory process. Douglas Kirsner explains that the leaders of the APA in the 1920s actually deceived the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) by stating that in the State of New York there was a law that decreed that only physicians could practice analysis.⁹ The APA therefore made a direct decision to present the practice as a medical science, and attach itself to psychiatry. Kirsner argues that this decision brings a key distinction within the approach to the surface, that of critical and professional psychoanalysis: “Critical psychoanalysis focuses on an open investigation of the field of the unconscious using the psychoanalytic investigative procedure while professionalised psychoanalysis treats primarily the derivatives of this procedure – the therapy and the

⁷ Clarence Oberndorf, cited in Douglas Kirsner, ‘Is There a Future for American Psychoanalysis?’ *The Psychoanalytic Review* 77, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 177. See also Clarence Oberndorf, *A History of Psychoanalysis in America* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1953).

⁸ Kirsner, ‘Is there a Future,’ 175-200.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

collection of information.”¹⁰ As Kirsner explains, critical psychoanalysis seeks the truth behind the human mind; it has no end point and is a free and fluid method of understanding the human psyche and society. Professional psychoanalysis on the other hand, seeks to cure the patient, which Freud feared could lead only to pragmatism, and the influence of financial rather than intellectual motives.¹¹

Kirsner argues that had the APA not gone to such great lengths to have psychoanalysis recognised as a science like psychiatry, the therapeutic practice might be more successful today. Psychodynamic psychotherapy – a form of analysis that the patient only attends one to three times a week – grew in popularity as it was cheaper and less time-consuming than traditional psychoanalysis, but this again entailed a loss of focus on the development of knowledge and understanding, and instead was driven by results and profitability. Simultaneously, from the mid-1960s onwards improvements in pharmacology and psychoactive drugs further side-lined analytic treatments. The 1980s saw the foundations of dissent laid for the start of ‘the Freud Wars’, as a number of scholars publically challenged the efficacy of psychoanalysis as a therapy, whilst critiquing its lack of empirical evidence and likening any successes to the placebo effect.¹² Peaking in an eighteen-month-long debate in the mid-1990s, the Freud Wars saw scholars such as Frederick C. Crews arguing that psychoanalysis is essentially a farce based on Freud’s own desire for fame, tricking unknowing patients, as well as the general public, into thinking that it can provide insights into the human mind and cures for psychological problems that it cannot actually deliver.¹³ Nevertheless, even though these debates did diminish Freudian

¹⁰ Kirsner, ‘Is there a Future,’ 181.

¹¹ Ibid 182.

¹² Richard Forrester, *Dispatches from the Freud Wars: Psychoanalysis and its Passions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹³ Frederick C. Crews, ‘Analysis Terminable,’ *Commentary Magazine* July 1 1980, accessed February 20 2015, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/analysis-terminable>.

theory in the eyes of the public, Burnham believes that the dawn of the twenty-first century has seen the rebirth of a fresh and growing interest in psychoanalysis in America.¹⁴ He argues that these ‘New Freud’ scholars forgo the focus on Freud’s biography and polemics that fuelled much of the fire behind the Freud Wars, and instead look to both the positive and negative social impacts of psychoanalysis and the cultural engagement with it. He writes: “In particular, leading current scholars who seek balance and perspective recognize in many nuanced ways the cultural historical contexts from which psychoanalytic ideas emerged and the changing cultures into which they penetrated.”¹⁵ Burnham argues that another key component of the New Freud Studies is the attention paid to the work of psychoanalysts other than Freud himself.¹⁶

Thinking back to the previous chapter of this thesis, these stark differences in practice between America and France clearly display how psychoanalysis has been adapted across the world, and what influence this adaption has had on the theory that has been produced. I believe that the womb phantasy provides an excellent case study through which to explore these variances, as the symbiotic union between mother and child has been engaged with in both the more philosophical and clinical approaches to psychoanalytic investigation. The mother-child bond of early life has been the subject of much debate, whether in relation a more philosophical or social understanding of the human mind (such as with Kristeva), or the physical and mental development of the child (Anzieu, and as will be discussed, Margaret Mahler). It is not as simple as to say that all French psychoanalysis is focused on an exploration of the psyche over clinical results, and that American psychoanalysis is an entirely medical affair, but

¹⁴ John C. Burnham, *After Freud Left: A Century of Psychoanalysis in America* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 8-9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ John C. Burnham, ‘The “New Freud Studies”: A Historiographical Shift,’ *The Journal of the Historical Society* 6, no. 2 (June 2006): 213-233.

that during different time periods and in different countries certain tendencies appeared favouring either side of the approach.

What is specifically interesting in the case of America in relation to film, psychoanalysis, and the mother-child bond, is how the country's particular relationship with Freud's work became ingrained into the public psyche and was explored socially and artistically. In contrast to the rise and fall of professional psychoanalysis in the country and the debates in the scholarly reception and application of Freudian thought, psychoanalysis has become deeply subsumed into American culture itself. Lawrence R. Samuel argues that Freudian thinking is still ingrained into American life even if the man himself is being forgotten:

Even as classic psychoanalysis... became just a bit player on the nation's therapeutic stage, its presence in American culture continued to grow to the point where we now accept it as one of the seminal ways to explain human nature. We've all been 'shrunk', it could safely be said, whether or not we have actually spent time on the couch.¹⁷

Concepts such as the unconscious, dream interpretation, repression and the Oedipus complex are fully entrenched in the American vernacular. Although it was largely only the wealthy elite who could enter into analysis, public interest in Freud's theories was increased through the work of people such as the paediatrician Benjamin Spock, whose book *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* introduced psychoanalysis to generations of young mothers. Simultaneously, films such as *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940), *Spellbound* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1945) and *Whirlpool* (Otto Preminger, 1949) projected the therapy and theory onto the big screen, although often with a large degree of artistic license.

Coinciding with this growing public fascination with psychoanalysis and the unconscious mind was a growing fear about mental health. As Robert Genter reports,

¹⁷ Lawrence R. Samuel, *Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), ix.

the National Mental Health Study Act of 1955 enabled eleven reports to be produced collating data from across the country on the state of the population's psychological wellbeing. These reports revealed widespread dissatisfaction, isolation and feelings of helplessness.¹⁸ However, as Genter argues, the public fascination with mental health dwelt less on the general malaise of a large proportion of its population and instead on the severe pathological issues of a few. The small minority with psychopathic personalities were presented in the popular press as being a potential threat to the general population. Simultaneously, throughout the 1940s and 1950s there was a growth in the fear of sex crimes, and pathological behaviour became interlinked with sexual deviance. There was an increase in fiction and non-fiction writing on the psychopath, and interest in real-life serial killers such as Ed Gein. Gein had been arrested in 1957 for the murder of Bernice Worden, but when police searched his house they discovered numerous objects made out of human bones and skin from a number of other bodies, which he claimed he had exhumed from graveyards. Significantly, in view of the focus of this thesis, Gein was devoted to his domineering and highly religious mother, and after her death he set about making a suit from the skin of women who resembled her so that he could inhabit it. Gein's crimes went on to act as the inspiration for numerous horror and thriller films throughout modern American history, including *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), and *House of 1000 Corpses* (Rob Zombie, 2003). The first of these, and arguably the most influential, was based on a book from 1959 by the horror writer Robert Block. Block picked up on this macabre public fascination with this sexual psychopath and turned Gein's story into a fictional piece about a young man living in a motel with his mother. In 1960 the British director Alfred Hitchcock,

¹⁸ Robert Genter, "'We all go a Little Mad Sometimes': Alfred Hitchcock, American Psychoanalysis, and the Construction of the Cold War Psychopath," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 40, no. 2 (2010): 133-162.

working in America, adapted Bloch's book into a film that would transform the country's horror cinema forever. *Psycho* has become an icon of the genre as a whole and the period after its release saw a dramatic shift in the common narratives that appeared in horror films. Although on the surface this film looks to be about a sexually repressed man under the sway of Oedipal desire, I propose that it is the mother who is the true source of monstrosity in this work. Norman represents the horror of the child who has never been able to fully detach himself from the maternal womb.

“A Boy's Best Friend is His Mother”: Symbiosis and Maternal Love

Steve Neale argues that the release of *Psycho* is often seen as the beginning of a new period in American horror cinema as it was “the film which located horror firmly and influentially within the modern psyche, the modern world, modern relationships and the modern (dysfunctional) family”.¹⁹ Charles Derry also sees *Psycho* as the film which “redefined the iconography of horror” transforming the genre into the “horror of personality”, arguing that the monster was no longer visibly different, but instead the everyday man or woman on the street.²⁰ Conversely, Noël Carroll argues that *Psycho* cannot be considered as a film within the horror genre *per se*, for Norman Bates is not (in Carroll's opinion) a true monster, as he has no links to the supernatural.²¹ But it is Norman's humanity that is the cause of the precise shift in horror cinema. The monster of the horror film no longer needed to be a supernatural or an alien entity, but could be anyone at all. Horror had come home, and there was no way to escape it.

¹⁹ Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), 96.

²⁰ Charles Derry, 'More Dark Dreams: Some Notes on the Recent Horror Film,' in: *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern Horror Film*, ed. Gregory A. Waller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 163-174.

²¹ Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 27-28.

The relationship between Norman and his mother in *Psycho* is a quintessential example of the American fascination with the incorporation of Freudian concepts into film. This section will first explore how and why this shift towards the family occurred in the middle of the twentieth century, and the influential role that pop-Freudian theories played in the demonisation of the mother. It will look at the representation of Mrs Bates, along with two other monstrous mothers from American horror – Mrs Voorhees from *Friday the 13th* and Mrs White from *Carrie* – to show how their intense relationships with their children are represented as pathological and dangerous. Using the psychoanalytic concepts of symbiosis and pseudosymbiosis it will then propose that these mother-child dyads are trapped in a form of womb phantasy that is positioned as a threat to patriarchal society. I will argue that although a surface reading of these films displays monstrous mothers and their perverse desire to ‘protect’ their children, a deeper critical engagement with these works, through reading their narratives and use of womb symbolism as a symptom of repression, reveals a far more difficult relationship with the love for the mother. I propose that these films clearly show how the *desire not to desire* the mother may not be as deep as patriarchal society might like.

The importance given to the family is one of the key tropes that demarcate modern American horror cinema. Prior to 1960, in what could be called the classic period of the country’s horror cinema, films depicted an outside entity such as a vampire, beast or murderer, causing threat to a person or persons. In the 1930s and 40s American horror films were predominantly based on traditional gothic literature with productions such as *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931) and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Victor Fleming, 1941). Tony Magistrale stresses the need to see the monsters in

horror films as ‘historical signifiers’ of the period in which they were made.²² He argues that it is not surprising that during this period in which the world saw the rise and fall of powerful dictators, that American horror cinema featured European monsters threatening communities before being destroyed by collective action. Moving into the 1950s, the fear of nuclear weapons and the space race took over and a proliferation of alien invasion and mutated monster films flourished in the cinemas. Titles such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951) and *The Thing from Another World* (Christian Nyby, 1951) showed alien forces threatening the stability of Earth and allowed for society to play out fears concerning the Cold War, nuclear weaponry and post-Hiroshima guilt. Simultaneously ‘creature features’ like *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (Ray Harryhausen, 1953), *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Jack Arnold, 1954) and *Them!* (Gordon Douglas, 1954) portrayed monsters formed by radiation-induced mutation, featuring genetic mutation, or who have been awoken by an atomic blast.

However with the release of *Psycho* the threat stopped being an exterior force and instead was from the most private of interiors, the family, and even more so, the mind.²³ From 1960 onwards, American horror cinema entered into its modern period, with narratives that often focused either directly or indirectly on the family.²⁴ Instead of an exterior force threatening the interior of the home and family life, now the threat of a distorted family or family-member endangered not only the safety of others in that family, but also the wider world. Because Norman Bates is a ‘normal’ human

²² Tony Magistrale, *Abject Terrors: Surveying the Modern and Postmodern Horror Film* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), xiv.

²³ It should be noted that *Psycho* was not the only film from this year that marked this shift, but it is the most prominent and arguably the most influential. A key British film with a similar human male antagonist was *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960).

²⁴ Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996). This is not to say that alien invasion, creature or gothic horror films were not made, but that even in these films, the family often took centre stage.

being not under the influence of any supernatural or scientific force, reasons are sought for the corrupt nature of his behaviour. It is clearly proposed that his actions are the direct influence of unnatural parental behaviour: a mother who did not bring up her son in the correct manner. Although his killing may be monstrous, the real monster in this film is Mrs Bates and her psychological control over her offspring. The motif of the mother unwilling to release her child from the symbiotic grasp became one of the enduring features of American horror cinema.

Although this narrative turn towards the family that signalled – and to some extent, defined – modern American horror cinema has been widely discussed in film scholarship, the question of how the genre as a whole symbolically represented this relationship has been neglected. Psychoanalytic theory can be used to explore how these works engaged with the shifting role of family life within an ever-changing society on a visual level as well as a narrative one, through the analysis of the symbolic elements they contain. I propose that the same time that family – and in particular mother-child – relationships came to the fore, the use of womb symbolism began to flourish in these works, specifically through the location of house and the use of water. Further to this, it is important to note that the representations of mothers and fathers are very different in these films. With the exception of films that show male possession, it is more often mothers that are outwardly monstrous, with fathers tending to be apathetic or useless characters. But, as will be discussed later in this chapter, when a father does become monstrous it is usually through possession by a malevolent force extending from a haunted house (a symbol of the maternal womb), therefore mitigating blame. On the other hand, a mother's monstrosity is represented as being integral to her personality; it comes from within her and is a deeply rooted part of her behaviour. The maternal psyche is represented as a potentially deadly

force. These mainstream American horror films appear to be entrenched in a patriarchal rhetoric that needs to constantly stress the possible dangers of maternal love.

I propose that one of the reasons for this shift to the importance of the family environment and specifically the role of the mother in American horror cinema after 1960 was the result of the pervasion of psychoanalytic theory in popular culture throughout the 1940s and 1950s.²⁵ With Freud's basic concepts becoming common knowledge and the Kinsey report opening the doors to private sexual behaviour, society's view of sex was changing. The 1950s was a decade that was at once both oppressive and liberating for women, with a return to the home after the war-effort occurring simultaneously with a rise in sexual liberalism. Although forms of pre-marital sexual expression such as dating and heavy-petting became socially acceptable, the average marrying age for women dropped to the lowest that it had been in decades.²⁶ People were marrying younger, but they were more sexually experienced and had begun to place an emphasis on sexual enjoyment as separate from procreation. As Barbara Klinger writes: "Middle-class couples headed towards marriage, conversant with Freud and aware of the availability of contraception, placed a great emphasis on sex as a marker of well-being".²⁷ Sex had become an object of highbrow investigation through the Kinsey Report, and lowbrow entertainment, with the decade seeing the introduction of mainstream soft-core publications such as *Playboy* and *Dude*.

²⁵ When speaking of the American family I am referring to lower to middle class white America. Unfortunately a discussion of the position of race in the production and reception of American horror cinema is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is an area of increasing interest within horror film studies. See: Robin R. Means Coleman, *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

²⁶ Linda Wagner-Martin, *A History of American Literature: 1950s to the Present* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 141.

²⁷ Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 52.

Annegret S. Ogden believes that during this period the housewife became central to American society.²⁸ Ogden argues that even though working mothers made up a large proportion of society, it was the ‘Supermother’ who was seen as the norm to which everyone should aspire. Women were encouraged to see rearing children as their form of employment, and to believe that “the children themselves would serve as their medium for job satisfaction and success”.²⁹ But with this elevated position came the potential for failure. By the 1950s knowledge of Freudian psychoanalysis was widespread in middle-class America, making mothers believe that every aspect of their offspring’s childhood could have an effect on the adults that they were to become. This led to an increase in over-bearing behaviour in mothers who were keen to control every part of their child’s life. Ogden writes:

The doctors of the fifties had been exposed to Freudian theory to one degree or another. If they learned nothing else from Freud, they learned that mothers were responsible for their children’s failures and that they walked a thin line between overprotectiveness and inattention. Thus, the young wives of the fifties inherited the guilt bred by Freud and his followers in the thirties. They had to be better mothers yet.³⁰

This new breed of controlling mothers had more involvement with their children’s lives than ever before. By the end of the 1950s, growing secularisation, and the pull between moral values and sexual liberation, put the American family under an almost insurmountable strain.

Therefore the reason why the horror genre turned towards the family in the 1960s was a result of a variety of converging factors. The post-war baby boom and threats of Communism and the Cold War focused the country on the role of the family, and a general knowledge of Freudian psychoanalysis highlighted the effect of upbringing on adult life. Women were praised for their domesticated and passive roles, but many

²⁸ Annegret S. Ogden, *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776 - 1986* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986).

²⁹ Ibid., 174.

³⁰ Ibid., 175.

were left feeling isolated, unfulfilled and depressed, and used their children as a way to find self-worth. Finally, sex was talked about more openly than ever before, yet simultaneously the insistence on heterosexual monogamy meant that many newly discovered desires had to be controlled or refused. The 1950s was a decade of exploration, yet it was also one of intense repression, especially within the walls of the family home, and therefore a means of release was needed, an object for this turmoil to be projected onto and experienced in a safe environment. Repression, and its return, became the driving force of horror cinema, climaxing with the intra-family crimes of *Psycho*, and the horrors of what can happen if a mother refuses to let her child detach from the symbiotic union.

At a narrative level *Psycho* is an example of the popularity of pop-Freudianism rife in America at this time. Oedipal desire, the primal scene, anal-compulsive behaviour and castration, are all hinted at, but not fully explored, and the film even contains the character of a psychiatrist who attempts to explain Norman's psychological illness at the end. However, Nick Redfern argues that the psychiatrist's explanation is contradictory and confusing, allowing Hitchcock to manipulate and disturb the film's audience so that they leave the cinema unsure of how to comprehend Norman:

Hitchcock is able to generate a level of uncertainty with the spectator by deliberately using our *a priori* knowledge of Freud and the cinema: first to offer one easily accepted solution and then to undermine it... Correspondingly, Freudian analysts are the subjects of Hitchcock's black humour as he pokes fun at the audience, and the simplistic Freudianism of Dr Richmond is revealed as inadequate.³¹

The most commonly used Freudian concept to discuss *Psycho*, from both a narrative and audience reception level, is castration.³² Mrs Bates is seen as the castrating

³¹ Nick Redfern, "Leading them Down the Garden Path": Another Look at Hitchcock's *Psycho*, *EnterText* 1, no.3 (Autumn 2001): 62.

³² See: Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 139-150; Linda Williams, 'Discipline and Fun: *Psycho* and Postmodern Cinema,' in *Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho: A Casebook* ed. Robert Phillip Kolker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 164-204.

mother, whilst Hitchcock himself forces a form of castration on an audience unable to sink into the sutured state of film spectatorship and identification. I believe that this reading of the film fails to take into account a critical part of the film's subtext. The real source of monstrosity in *Psycho* comes from Norman's love for his mother, a love that is so strong that he cannot bear her to have a relationship with anyone other than him. Throughout the film the audience is led to believe that it is Mrs Bates who is the monster. Then with the revelation that Norman is the real killer the blame falls for a moment on his shoulders. But any questioning as to why Norman would behave as he did is easily led back to the behaviour of his overbearing mother.

I propose that *Psycho* should be read as a representation of the American patriarchal society's fear of the symbiotic relationship between mother and child. The film is a tale of the terrors that may occur if a child is unable to detach from their mother. From the 1950s to the 1970s the Hungarian born psychoanalyst Margaret Mahler pioneered the study of symbiotic relationships as part of her extensive career in America. Mahler proposes that child development occurs over a number of stages as the infant slowly becomes able to establish their own identity. She argues that in the initial period after birth the infant is in a state of 'normal autism', unable to comprehend that there is anything beyond themselves. From their second month onwards they enter into a phase of symbiosis in which "the infant behaves and functions as though he and his mother were an omnipotent system – a dual unity with one common boundary".³³ This relationship is not a symbiosis in the biological sense, rather the term is a metaphor for the state where a child is unable to distinguish between what is itself and what is other. As Mahler explains: "The essential feature of symbiosis is hallucinatory or delusional, somatopsychic, omnipotent fusion with the

³³ Margaret Mahler, 'On Human Symbiosis and the Vicissitudes of Individuation,' *The Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 15, no. 4 (Oct 1967): 741.

representation of the mother and, in particular, delusion of common boundary of the two actually physically separate individuals.”³⁴ From about five months of age the child then enters into the separation-individuation phase, where they start to recognise the mother as a separate being. Mahler sees this early stage of the ego as coming about through an ability to wait for satisfaction, knowing that the mother will return, feed or clean it in time. This awareness demonstrates traces of memory, as well as the existence of pleasurable feelings when such external care is received. As the child develops and is able to move away from its mother by itself, it will still seek to return to her, and holds her as an internal object. The child starts to explore the mother’s body, touching her face and embracing her, suggesting that it is building an awareness of the mother as *other*. However, this period of exploration and the beginning of the comprehension of the separateness of the mother creates an anxiety in the child and it returns to a stage that Mahler terms ‘rapprochement’, lasting up to about two years of age. During this sub-phase the child becomes more attached to the mother again due to the fear of abandonment and loss. Eventually with the acquisition of language and the development of the superego the child is able to let go of the fantasy of oneness with her and develop its own psychic identity. Mahler suggests that if this process of individuation is not successful, then pathological behaviour can be the result.

Mahler’s research into early childhood symbiosis has much in common with Anzieu’s theory of the Skin Ego. In the French psychoanalyst’s book he draws on Mahler to discuss the stage of the Skin Ego where the child begins to perceive of itself as a Self, which he aligns with her separation-individuation phase. He writes:

At the third stage, with access to three-dimensionality and projective identification, there appears the internal object space which is similar to, but distinct from, the internal space of the Self, spaces into which thought may be projected or introjected; the inner world begins to become

³⁴ Mahler, ‘On Human Symbiosis,’ 742.

organized by virtue of phantasies of exploring the interior of the mother's body; the apparatus for dealing with such thoughts becomes constituted: 'the child hatches from the symbiotic membrane'... But the state of symbiosis persists; time is frozen, repetitive or oscillating, cyclical.³⁵

This stage marks the shift from the intrauterine psychological existence of the 'autistic' stage of the first few months of life, where the child's knowledge is fully bound to its existence with the mother, to the point where it *wants* to be with her. I propose that this shift could be considered as a move from a womb delusion (the child does not know anything else) to a womb phantasy. As Anzieu argues, although the child has broken free from the symbiotic psychic relationship with the mother, it seeks to return to it, through an imagined exploration of her body. Although neither Anzieu nor Mahler discusses the importance of the womb, it is clearly this symbolic space that the child seeks, and continues to seek in the oscillation of the separation-individuation phase. Therefore the desire to return to the symbolic maternal womb is the very first true phantasy, a desire not brought about by the need for something (food, cleaning, sleep), but an emotional desire in itself. It is the womb phantasy that instigates and signals the child's first steps towards individuation.

Whilst Mahler's object relations approach shared much with the British psychoanalysts working during this period such as Donald Winnicott, her work also had a great influence on the field of American psychoanalysis in which she was situated. One such theorist was Klaus Angel who refined the theory of symbiosis using the case studies of a number of his patients.³⁶ Angel distinguishes between symbiosis – where self and object are merged and cannot be distinguished from each other, such as in early infancy, and pseudosymbiosis – where merging is a defensive fantasy and self and object are known to be distinct. He stresses that in order for adult

³⁵ Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, 64.

³⁶ Klaus Angel, 'On Symbiosis and Pseudosymbiosis,' *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 15, no. 2 (April 1967): 294-316.

relationships to be truly symbiotic there must be an inability to distinguish the boundary between the self and the object. This would entail that the person has remained fixated on the early mother-child bond and is unable to move past it on an intrapsychic level. Angel contends that this should be distinguished from pseudosymbiosis, which can cause a regression to the symbiotic state, but only as a phantasy of merging with the object. Importantly even in this pseudosymbiotic phantasy the subject still retains a sense of their individual self. In the clinical setting, symbiosis is bound to the fear of devouring or being devoured by the mother, resulting in a loss of identity that is deemed possible as the self and object cannot be distinguished. This fear does not exist in pseudosymbiotic relationships as self and object are separate, and the wish to merge operates as a defence mechanism against violent impulses towards the object.

This idea of a devouring mother provides a counter-reading to the commonly used concept of castration in the analysis of *Psycho*. As with the previously discussed need to separate the womb phantasy from issues of sexual desire, this idea of being devoured is not linked to the loss of the penis, but a complete loss of self. Undoubtedly the themes of castration and Norman's sexuality are integral to this film, but in terms of the mother-child union that is positioned as the root of his monstrosity, it is the pre-sexual symbiotic relationship that is key. His mother threatens Norman through the loss of his identity by his being consumed in a symbiotic relationship with her. It could be proposed that this fear of being devoured is represented through the motifs of eating and food throughout the film. Michael Walker has studied the link between food, marriage, sex and murder in Hitchcock's work, arguing that in nearly every one of the director's films there is a stress placed on food or meals.³⁷ In the case

³⁷ Michael Walker, *Hitchcock's Motifs* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

of *Psycho* Walker argues that sex and food are conflated in the film, and that as with some of Hitchcock's other films, food or hunger is used as a metaphor for a female character's sexual appetite: "a sexually active woman is a hungry woman".³⁸ However, in *Psycho* the male sexual appetite is also linked to food. In the opening post-coital scene Sam discusses the steak that he and Marion would have together, whilst in contrast the meal that Norman offers up is made of sandwiches and milk. David Greven argues that this meal is "squishy and soft, nonphallic".³⁹ Greven reads Norman as a queer character, contending that this meal represents the impossibility of any sexual relationship between him and Marion. However, in a slight contrast to Greven, I propose that this meal is childlike, symbolising the pre-sexual symbiotic relationship that Norman has with his mother.

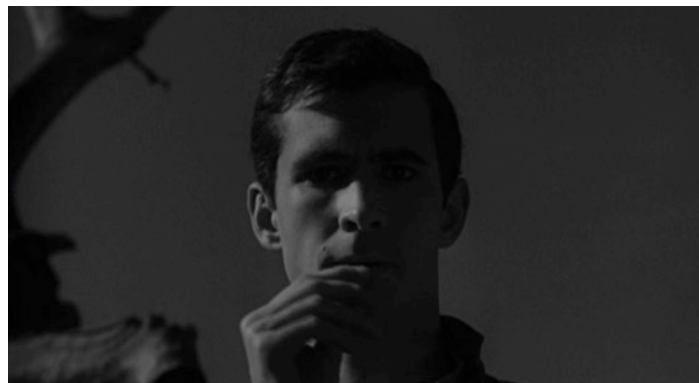


Figure 3.1: Norman's constant eating fends off the devouring mother

Susan Smith proposes that in a number of Hitchcock's films food acts as a symbol of the body of the mother, entailing that when the male characters in his films reject food, they are rejecting maternal love and care.⁴⁰ Critically, Norman does not reject food. In fact he is seen eating in many of his scenes, even when he is disposing of Marion's body and car into the swamp. Using Smith's analysis this would suggest

³⁸ Walker, *Hitchcock's Motifs*, 185.

³⁹ David Greven, 'Engorged with Desire: The Films of Alfred Hitchcock and the Gendered Politics of Eating,' in *Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film* ed. Anne Bower (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 298.

⁴⁰ Susan Smith, 'Cinematic Point of View in the Films of Hitchcock' (PhD Thesis, University of Sunderland, 1997), 197.

that Norman is not rejecting his mother's care, but filling up on it. However, I propose that his constant eating could also be regarded as a means of defence against the annihilation of self that comes with the devouring mother. When Norman is himself he eats, whereas when he is mother he devours others (kills), in the same manner that his mother has devoured his own sense of self. He is fighting the pull back to the mythical womb-space of the symbiotic union, which would result in his loss of individuality. His reaction to 'mother's' killing of Marion suggests that when he is himself he finds these acts abhorrent, and therefore the process of eating could represent an attempt to ward off the hunger of the devouring mother, exchanging food for death and reassuring him that he is still Norman. This filmic representation of the symbiotic union as one in which the child is fearful of being devoured is important as it places blame directly on the mother as being overbearing and indeed monstrous, whereas the child (Norman) is seen as the victim, even though it is still his body doing the killing. Therefore the mother-child bond is represented in *Psycho* as being dangerous, and it is the mother who is the true source of this monstrosity. But why is this bond so threatening to patriarchal society, and the need to split from and reject it represented as vital?

Nancy Chodorow explores the importance of the symbiotic mother-child dyad and its mechanism in society in her book *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Chodorow distinguishes between the actual mother, and the act of mothering, which could be carried out by either sex but falls almost exclusively to women. Drawing on both sociology and psychoanalysis Chodorow contends that this reproduction of mothering is undertaken by women themselves, but under the influence of patriarchal society:

The contemporary reproduction of mothering occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes. It is neither a product of biology nor of intentional role-training... Women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These

capacities and needs are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself. By contrast, women as mothers (and men as not-mothers) produce sons whose nurturant capacities and needs have been systematically curtailed and repressed.⁴¹

Building on Mahler's work, Chodorow contends that the mother acts as an external ego for the child, mediating the environment that surrounds it. As such, any sense of separation during this period can have long-lasting consequences on the child's developing psyche, as the mother makes up part of the child's very sense of existence. She argues that during this early symbiotic stage the infant "oscillates between perceptions of its mother as separate and as not separate. For the most part, in spite of cognitive perception of separateness, it experiences itself as within a common boundary and fused, physically and psychologically, with its mother."⁴² However, even though the child sees the mother as part of itself, this does not mean that it has no love for her. Unlike Freud and the ego psychologists that followed him in America, Chodorow agrees with Michael Balint's proposition of the child's primary love for the mother, which extends beyond the need for food and entails a desire for loving contact in order to develop the child's psyche. Chodorow contends that the process of differentiation from the mother begins when the child realises that it can have a direct effect on the world around it. With this realisation comes a growing sense of anxiety over the separation from the mother, and the child feels the need to counteract this fear by becoming more dependent on her, negating the fact of separation. Nevertheless, this process starts the child off on a gradual journey towards full individualisation.

Therefore Mahler, Angel and Chodorow all stress that the early mother-child dyad is critical to the development of the child's psyche. Chodorow writes: "The continuity

⁴¹ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press), 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 62.

of care enables the infant to develop a self – a sense that ‘I am’. The quality of any particular relationship however, affects the infant’s personality and self-identity. The experience of the self concerns *who* ‘I am’ and not simply *that* ‘I am’.”⁴³ This potentially lays blame for any pathological disturbance onto the actions of the mother in this early stage of childhood. She is seen as being in complete control of her child’s destiny, and any disturbances that she may be experiencing could be passed down onto her child. Simultaneously, this power that a mother holds cannot be assumed by patriarchy. It can be guided by society and culture, yet it is an area where phallic power is subsumed under the primary love for the mother. Robert Stoller argues that this original state of oneness between mother and child entails that primary identification for both boys and girls is not with the father and the phallus, but with the mother. Stoller critiques Freud’s reading of the development of childhood sexuality, arguing that girls are actually in a stronger psychic position during this process as their pre-Oedipal homosexual bond with the mother gives them a solid sense of female identity. Boys, on the other hand, must repudiate their primary identification with their mothers and cross over to associate with the father. Stoller suggests that overt ‘masculine’ behaviour in men could be due to the threat caused by this original identification with the feminine:

The whole process of becoming masculine is at risk in the little boy from the day of birth on; his still-to-be-created masculinity is endangered by the primary, profound, primeval oneness with mother, a blissful experience that serves, buried but active at the core of one’s identity, as a focus which, throughout life, can attract one to regress back to that primitive oneness.⁴⁴

I propose that the threat of the pull to return back to the loving symbiosis with the mother is the reason why monstrous mothers such as Mrs Bates prevail in horror

⁴³ Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, 77-78.

⁴⁴ Robert Stoller, ‘Facts and Fancies: An Examination of Freud’s Concept of Bisexuality,’ in *Women and Analysis*, ed. Jean Strouse (New York: Grossman, 1974), 358.

cinema. The symbiotic relationship between mother and child has to be represented as potentially corrupt and dangerous in order to appease patriarchal fear over its uncontrollable power. Unwilling to assume the task of mothering, patriarchy instead renders it as abject if not carried out under its rules of separation and rejection. As this representation operates on an unconscious level, it is not carried out through the explicit representation of the actual early mother-infant bond (although this does feature in some horror films), but by using a combination of the depiction of its aftermath in the child's later years, combined with symbolic womb and maternal imagery. Throughout his life Norman has oscillated from the original symbiotic relationship, to a pseudosymbiotic relationship when he and his mother acted like there was no one else in the world – and then back to a symbiotic one (in Norman's mind) after his mother's death. This post-mortem symbiosis is not a pseudosymbiosis as Norman is unable to distinguish between himself and his mother. As with the real case of Ed Gein, Norman attempts to inhabit his mother's skin, exposing a fixation on the early mother-child dyad that has never been able to be properly worked through. The reason for this inability of the child to free itself from the symbiosis, in the case of *Psycho*, is covertly expressed as being due to the mother's controlling behaviour. Mrs Bates is depicted as being the reason why Norman can never be free from her, and their symbiotic union has resulted in his need to kill.

Whereas *Psycho* depicts a post-mortem symbiotic relationship experienced by a child, Sean S. Cunningham's popular slasher film *Friday the 13th* shows a mother enrapt in a fantasy symbiotic relationship with her dead son.⁴⁵ When considering this film in light of the observations made about Mrs Bates and the devouring mother,

⁴⁵ Chodorow contends that the symbiotic union operates differently for mother and child, as the infant's need for the mother is absolute, whereas the mother's need for the child is relative. However, critically, Chodorow proposes that when the child is in early infancy the mother regresses back to her own experience of her symbiotic union with her mother, allowing her to regard the child as an extension of herself through her fantasy of symbiosis.

similar motifs can be found in this later work. Both films depict a mother and son locked in a symbiotic union that has been reborn after the death of one of the dyad. The horror in these works lies in the inability of parent and child to detach from each other, and the acts that this relationship incites them to carry out. In *Psycho* Norman Bates ‘becomes’ his mother when he kills Marion, wearing her clothes and speaking for her whilst her dead body rests in their home. In *Friday the 13th* Mrs Voorhees takes on the voice of her dead son as she chases after her young victims, whispering “Kill her mommy” as she viciously attacks one of her prey. These relationships show a symbiosis so extreme that mother and son have become one. This merging is represented formally in both films through different editing techniques. In the final scene of *Psycho* the face of the preserved corpse of Mrs Bates is superimposed over that of her son as he huddles in the police office, the empty sockets of her eyes hauntingly placed over her son’s eerily placid visage. In *Friday the 13th* instead of superimposition uniting the faces of mother and son a succession of faded shots are used in a cross-cutting between a close-up of Mrs Voorhees face and a shot of Jason drowning in the lake. The use of such fading appears again when Mrs Voorhees is chasing Final Girl Alice, this time between an image of a full moon and a close up of the mother’s face, speaking in the voice of Jason and then answering him with maternal reassurance.



Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4: Visual representations of the symbiotic union

It is in this image of the drowning Jason that the idea of the devouring mother appears once more, proving an example of how the representation of the combination of an abnormal symbiotic union with womb and maternal imagery can be read as an unconscious symptom of the patriarchal fear of the mother-child bond. As a body of water, lakes are a predominant womb symbol in Freudian psychoanalysis. The waters of the lake are responsible for Jason's death, sucking him under and devouring him as he helplessly flounders. Once he has succumbed to death he exists in the symbiotic union via his mother, his own face replaced with an image of the lake as a representative of their bond. It is only once his mother has died that he can be free once more, and in the film's climax rises out of the lake to attack Alice. This supernatural re-birth enables the film to enter into the cycle of sequels synonymous with the slasher subgenre, and the monstrous Jason takes over his mother's duty of killing sex-crazed teenagers. Subsequently the lake symbolises the maternal womb as both the place where he dies (he loses his identity due to being consumed by the

devouring mother) but is also able to be reborn again, naked, wet and hairless like a new infant.

Whereas *Psycho* and *Friday the 13th* portray the pseudosymbiotic and symbiotic relationships between mother and son, Brian De Palma's *Carrie* shows a young girl and her struggle to separate herself from her religious fanatic mother Margaret White. Next to *Psycho*, *Carrie* is one of the most critically discussed American horror films of all time.⁴⁶ Sue Short views *Carrie* as a re-writing of the Cinderella story, arguing that traditionally the troubled relationships between mothers and daughters in fairy tales were seen as a way of preparing girls for the separation from their mothers that would come with adulthood and marriage. Short argues that as in horror films, mothers were often represented in fairy tales as evil and corrupt: "The 'bad mother' archetype has... been critically perceived as a means of psychologically acknowledging that mothers are imperfect, and potentially capable of cruelty or selfishness – an acknowledgement that may be seen as helping the task of separation."⁴⁷ Greven also reads *Carrie* as a story of the separation between mother and child, arguing that this is a trauma that is felt equally by both sides and is fundamental to the film: "Formally and symbolically, *Carrie* thematizes the mother-child split through an obsessive cinematic design of relentless visual and metaphorical splitting".⁴⁸ On screen this splitting is created through the use of a split-diopter lens throughout the film that enables the camera to have two points of focus within the

⁴⁶ See: Paula Matusa, 'Corruption and Catastrophe: De Palma's *Carrie*,' *Film Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Autumn 1977); Alison M. Kelly, 'The Queen Bee, the Prom Queen, the Girl Next Door: Teen Hierarchical Structures in *Carrie*,' in: *The Films of Stephen King: From Carrie to Secret Window*, ed. Tony Magistrale (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Eyal Peretz, *Becoming Visionary: Brian De Palma's Cinematic Education of the Senses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). *Carrie* is also regarded to be an important queer cult film. For a discussion of the many appropriations of De Palma's film see Darren Elliott-Smith, 'Queering the Cult of *Carrie*: Appropriations of a Horror Icon in Charles Lum's *Indelible*,' in *Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation*, ed. Iain Robert Smith, *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies* ebook (October 2009): 138-156.

⁴⁷ Short, *Misfit Sisters*, 71.

⁴⁸ David Greven, *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema: The Woman's Film, Film Noir, and Modern Horror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 96.

shot. This allows De Palma to invoke what Greven calls “subterranean levels of meaning”, associating and contrasting characters against one another and highlighting the relationships that exist between them.⁴⁹



Figure 3.5: Mrs White, the monstrous mother of the symbiotic union

Greven contends that Carrie should not be considered in an Oedipal context, instead his argument is formed around what he titles the Persephone Complex – the necessity of the split from the mother that is needed in order for the child to enter the social order. As Greven writes, this mother-child bond is “simultaneously, culturally enforced and culturally abnegated, made all important *and* a stage from which the child must be weaned, a stage that the child must be trained *to desire to reject*”.⁵⁰ It is the mother’s duty to raise a well-adjusted child, to protect her offspring from harm and to nurture and care for all their needs, yet the mother must also be rejected, the bond split in order for the child to progress in patriarchal society. However, Greven has neglected the fact that Carrie and her mother do not separate. I propose, in contrast, that at the end of the film their symbiotic relationship is re-formed through the womb-like space of the prayer cupboard. Alongside its narrative of splitting, De Palma’s film also focuses on cycles and repetition, as it is saturated with references and symbolic representations of the womb and the female menstrual cycle.

⁴⁹ Greven, *Representations of Femininity*, 94.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

As Carrie struggles to enter the adult realm, she is constantly returned to a childlike relationship with her mother. Mrs White is depicted as being unable to let her daughter go and even after death, manages to keep her hold over her. At the start of the film when Carrie returns home after getting her period at school she goes to her mother for comfort and an explanation, yet all she finds is sin and damnation. Her mother screams at her that she is a woman now, yet as Mrs White drags her into the praying cupboard as punishment she is also symbolically dragging her away from adulthood back into the symbiotic relationship. She can control her daughter through this confined space, and to some extent succeeds in doing so, as when Carrie emerges from the cupboard later on she is calm and childlike, thanking her mother and going to bed like a good girl. After the prom too (Carrie's disastrous attempt at a grand entry into patriarchal culture) she returns home to seek her mother's comfort, but Mrs White tries to control her again, this time through attempting to kill her daughter. She succeeds too, for although Carrie may have been able to survive her single stab wound, the force of the split from her mother through Mrs White's demise is too much, and mother and daughter are re-joined in symbiotic union through Carrie's suicide.

Like Mrs Bates, the character of Mrs White in *Carrie* is key to the film's psychological power. Both films feature overbearing mothers whose controlling actions ultimately create the monsters that their children become. Short contends that these two mothers are "near-parodies of traditional psychoanalytic tendencies towards maternal blame, their offspring demonstrating the disastrous consequences of over-identification in a society that encourages both emotional and physical separation".⁵¹ Fathers are noticeably absent from both films, and, as is often the case in the horror

⁵¹ Short, *Misfit Sisters*, 72.

genre, the single mothers that are left raising the children are unable to do so successfully. Therefore like *Psycho* and *Friday the 13th*, *Carrie* portrays the monstrous relationship that is created when mother and child do not detach from each other, thus barring the child from entering the patriarchal order. De Palma's film develops this theme of the monstrosity of symbiosis further, through his suggestion that it is not just the overbearing mother that is horrific, or her relationship with her child that is wrong; instead *Carrie* is a film that portrays maternity in its entirety to be corrupt and abject. The menstrual cycle pervades this film, not just through Carrie's own period, but in the way that blood signifies the start of a horrific event. Not only are mothers represented as monstrous, but the very way in which woman creates child is also labelled as disgusting, animal and, most perversely of all, potentially deadly. It is only when Carrie gets her first period that her telekinetic powers are awakened within her, ultimately bestowing her with the power to get her bloody revenge, and again, her covering in pig's blood (an animalistic doubling of her own menstrual blood) when the vote from prom king and queen is rigged, is what brings out the evil within her. De Palma does not deny the normalcy of menstruation, yet he is also quick to show its abject status. In the first scene the girls taunt Carrie because she does not know what her period is, yet in the next scene as her gym teacher describes the situation to the headmaster, the sight of Carrie's blood on her white shorts disgusts the man to the point of shivering revulsion.

Carrie's menstrual blood is symbolic of two key themes. Firstly it is a physical manifestation of her monstrosity, its appearance at the same moment as her telekinetic powers suggesting that the two are linked, and secondly, it points outwards towards the monstrosity of femininity as a whole. Carrie's period marks her transition from childhood to adulthood. If, as Short argues, *Carrie* should be seen as a Cinderella

story preparing young girls to leave their mothers, Carrie's period does indeed start her own journey of attempting to remove herself from the intense relationship with her mother. However – contrary to Short's argument – this attempt at separation fails, as Carrie is so distraught after killing her mother that she literally brings the family home down on herself. Even though it is Carrie's period that starts her attempt at separating herself from her mother, it is also that which binds her to her mother, what Mrs White calls the "curse of blood" that all women share. This link between Carrie's individual monstrosity and the implied horror of femininity is also visible in the initial shower scene. As the opening credits roll a slow-motion camera depicts the young female students naked or semi-clad, their bodies wet and nymph-like as they frolic around the locker room. With the arrival of Carrie's period these young girls turn into demons, shouting and writhing in front of the camera. Shelley Stamp Lindsay argues that this transition represents the film's wider intentions, to shift the horror of Carrie's femininity on to the female population as a whole: "Not only is Carrie a *female* monster, but sexual difference is integral to the horror she generates; monstrosity is explicitly associated with menstruation and female sexuality".⁵² In contrast, Aviva Briefel refuses to see *Carrie* as purely a misogynistic vision of the horror of the female reproductive system.⁵³ Contrary to the works of Clover and Creed, Briefel argues that a female monster's femininity (through her reproductive abilities) actually relaxes the audience through its normality and encourages a sympathetic identification with her. Briefel argues that female monsters ultimately attract identification from the viewer as they only become monstrous after having been a victim themselves. The emotional or physical pain that the female monster suffers at

⁵² Shelley Stamp Lindsay, 'Horror, Femininity, and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty,' In *The Dread of Difference*, 284.

⁵³ Aviva Briefel, 'Monster Pains: Masochism, Menstruation, and Identification in the Horror Film,' *Film Quarterly* 58, no.3 (Spring 2005): 16-27.

the hands of another person or force (mother, father, fellow student, the devil) awakens the monstrous inside of her that could otherwise have remained dormant. This awakening is often represented physically through menstruation, therefore suggesting that this change comes uncontrollably from within. Mirroring the need for an exterior force to start her violence, her period reinforces her passivity as she has no power to stop it.

I disagree with Briefel, as although the female character may receive some form of sympathy due to the uncontrollable nature of her monstrosity, femininity as a whole is instead represented as monstrous, suggesting that there is something evil inside all women. An outside force may be needed to awaken it, but it is still there inside nonetheless. I also disagree with Briefel's argument that Carrie's period encourages identification from the audience as it is so clearly marked as abject within the narrative of the film. Further to this, if menstruation is the sign of the female monster's descent into violence it must also remind us of her procreative or maternal powers, something that Briefel fails to discuss in full. By stressing the innocence and powerlessness of the female monster and her inability to stop her own transformation into violence, menstruation – and therefore maternity – is seen as both the cause of the violence but also that which enables the monster to negate responsibility. This contradiction is reinforced by the actions of Carrie herself. After the cruelty of Chris's prank, and the brutality of Carrie's response, it is to her mother and her home that the young girl flees. She wants the comfort that a mother's love can give, yet Mrs White refuses to respond in the way that she craves, instead attempting to kill her. Even after Carrie stabs her mother to death she still wants the security of maternal affection, dragging her lifeless body into the small cupboard which earlier in the film she had been forced into as an act of punishment. It is in this cramped space that she finds

solace, and as she grips the dead body of her mother she pulls their house down on top of her.



Figures 3.6 and 3.7: Carrie's womb-space is both a source of horror, and of love

Therefore it could be proposed that Carrie's praying cupboard stands as a symbol of the maternal womb – a visual womb phantasy – representing the love for the mother and the desire to return to the symbiotic union, a union that is represented on a narrative (or conscious) level as being monstrous. As I have argued, the horror film allows its spectators to project and experience their repressed desire for their mothers. The constant representation of the mother as a negative figure shows that this desire has not been destroyed during childhood as Freud argued, but instead still exists and constantly seeks a safe way into the conscious mind. Mrs Bates, Mrs Voorhees and Mrs White stand as barriers put in place by patriarchal society to caution the audience against accepting this desire. These characters warn that if the oneness with the devouring mother is not given up, and is allowed to continue into a pseudosymbiotic adult relationship, then the only outcome is monstrosity and death. These films allow for a projection of these desiring feelings towards the mother onto their characters, a safe experience of them, and then an 'overcoming' of them (repressing them once more).

The Fear of What's Inside: Haunted House and Occult Films, Male Crisis and the Need to Run From the Womb

As discussed in the previous section, monstrous mothers were common characters in the narratives of the American family horror films of the modern period. Although male monsters predominated overall across the genre, it is striking that there are very few examples of monstrous fathers. This section will look at the one exception to this rule: the haunted house subgenre during the 1970s and 1980s. These narratives do feature monstrous fathers; however, this section will propose that their monstrosity only comes about through their inhabitation of a haunted house, and that therefore their malevolence is tied to maternity through the symbolic structure – both physical and emotional – of the home. Throughout these films houses are clearly marked as maternal spaces, entailing that even though the antagonist may be male, that which has caused his monstrosity is undeniably feminine. I propose that the key locations of these films are the cupboard, the bathroom and the cellar, and that all these spaces are deeply symbolic of the maternal womb. These locations act as pivotal sites within the narratives, representing both safety and danger, and marking turning points in the plots. Through their interaction with these spaces the family members learn that they must leave the house (which was once considered safe but is now deadly) and venture out beyond its walls.

In this section I will argue that the relationship between the home and the maternal allows patriarchy to negate the responsibility of the father for his actions due to his possession by evil spirits that extend from this symbolic womb space. This critical link between the possessed father and the maternal space of the home has been overlooked in existing scholarship on these films. Simultaneously, I will address the lack of scholarly discussion exploring the mother-characters in these works, whose role in their narratives is often overlooked in the face of a man in crisis. I propose that

like *Psycho*, *Carrie* and *Friday the 13th* and their monstrous mothers, haunted house films are underwritten with a warning against mother-child relationships. However, in contrast to those previous films, the haunted house subgenre can be seen to represent the successful break from the maternal, rather than a depiction of what will happen if this break is not made.

Although the home features strongly in all family-centred modern horror, it is in the occult film that this location is really pushed to the fore. Containing the subgenres of the haunted house and possession films, but also stretching to tales of demonic offspring such as Damien in *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976) or interactions with witchcraft or supernatural powers such as Carrie's telekinesis discussed earlier, the home plays a central role in all of these narratives as either an integral setting or indeed a player in the proceedings. Clover's reading of occult films – including the subgenre of the haunted house film – is that they feature the narrative opposition of White Science vs. Black Magic. White Science is the Western tradition: American, white, male, medical; Black Magic is the *other*: female, foreign, spiritual. "Wherein lies the plot", writes Clover, "convincing the White Science person of the necessity and indeed the superiority of Black Magic".⁵⁴ Clover argues that women and children are on the side of Black Magic, and contends that as such, it is often they who are possessed or have links to the supernatural. The men in their lives at first reject Black Magic, but in order to save the women they love they must accept that White Science cannot help and that Black Magic does exist. Clover argues that although this subgenre looks from the outside to be the most feminine of horror cinema, depicting women and children helpless against the grip of demonic forces, they are actually

⁵⁴ Clover, *Men Women and Chain Saws*, 67.

stories of men in crisis. In Clover's view, behind every possessed woman is a troubled man.⁵⁵

Three of the most well-known modern haunted house films from this period are *The Amityville Horror*, *The Shining* and *Poltergeist*. All three films feature families who move into homes that reveal themselves to be haunted by evil spirits, and they all present a crisis of paternal authority and ability. However, I believe that they also show a gap in Clover's argument and the wider field of scholarly research that surrounds these films.⁵⁶ *The Shining* and *The Amityville Horror* feature possessions, but it is the father who is possessed, not a woman or child. In these films the house manipulates the father into trying to kill his family. We can see this theme in the *Poltergeist* series too. Although there is no possession in *Poltergeist*, in its sequel, *Poltergeist II: The Other Side* (Brian Gibson, 1986) Steve becomes possessed by Kane, an evil ghost from the first film who is trying to recapture Carol Anne. The majority of critical study that has been done on this subgenre focuses primarily on the character of the father, therefore overlooking the important link between the home and the maternal that can be clearly read in the symbolism of these films. By only looking at economic and social factors they fail to regard the psychological position of the man in the haunted house subgenre house as one of a man in a feminine space. Through in-depth textual analysis it can be revealed that part of the horror of these houses and the manner in which they possess their male occupants, is due to the uncanny link to the maternal, specifically the womb.

⁵⁵ As stated above, although little scholarly research has been carried out on the haunted house subgenre as a whole, the films individually have received attention, or have been part of wider discussions on horror cinema during this period. However, the majority of these focus, like Clover, on the idea of the male in crisis. For example see: Sobchack, 'Bringing It All Back Home,' and TonyWilliams, 'Trying to Survive on the Darker Side: 1980s Family Horror,' in *The Dread of Difference*, 164-180.

⁵⁶ In the case of *The Shining* the building is a hotel rather than a residential house, but the domesticated space of the family's apartment forms one of the key locations of the narrative, especially its bathroom.

Charles Derry argues that there are certain areas within the home that are granted special significance in film, especially in the horror genre: stairways, cellars and bathrooms.⁵⁷ I propose that two more locations should be added to this list: the attic and the cupboard. In Freud's work these same locations also have special meanings often beyond other spaces such as the living room or the obvious location of the bedroom, and occur frequently in his case studies and dream analysis. The converging paths of psychoanalysis and horror cinema meet in cellars, attics, stairways, bathrooms and cupboards. I contend that these places proliferate within the horror genre due to their links to the maternal womb. Existing on the level of the symbolic and the unconscious, these spaces can act as covert areas for projection, allowing for an experience that remains partially free from patriarchal control.

Cellars and attics feature in nearly every horror film where the home acts as a key location. These are dark spaces that need to be investigated, often containing remnants of the past. As such they are associated with the storing of memories, of childhood toys no longer needed, old photographs and forgotten treasures. Not only could they be considered womb-like in their enclosed darkness, but their contents too suggest personal histories and family secrets. Next to the cellar and basement, the bathroom is also a frequently used location. What differentiates the bathroom from the attic or cellar is that it is a more everyday space. "The bathroom's importance is easy to understand," argues Derry, "it is the room that is the most personal, that is used to clean the body, to make it pure. Hence, whenever violence takes place within this room, it is particularly obscene and upsetting".⁵⁸ Whilst attics and cellars are dark and foreboding, bathrooms are safe spaces, bright and clean. Yet as Derry contends, this makes the events within them even more horrific. Whereas entry into the attic or

⁵⁷ Charles Derry, *Dark Dreams 2.0: A Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film from the 1950s to the 21st Century* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2009), 47.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

cellar comes as part of an investigation, often the arrival of the monster in the bathroom is a shock to the victim, or even occurs when they are completely unaware. Bathrooms are where people clean their ‘heimlich parts’ and as such have links to sex and the taboo of the genitals. To see someone in a bathroom is usually to see them naked or in a compromised position, both of which suggest childhood and the dependant state of the powerless infant. Scenes that are set in bathrooms often have strong sexual overtones. In *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984) Freddy’s gloved hand with its phallic blades rises up between the legs of an unknowing Nancy as she drifts off to sleep in the bath. In *Carrie*, the young girl is in the school communal shower when she gets her first period, signalling the arrival of her sexual maturity. In *Psycho* too, it is in the shower that Norman/Mrs Bates stabs Marion.

Although the bathroom is a key location in modern American horror cinema, I believe that an equally important site of action in these narratives is the cupboard. I propose that the cupboard has two uses in horror cinema: a portal to a hidden space or another world, and a space in which to hide. As such, these enclosed spaces have deeply rooted connections to the idea of the mythical maternal womb, which as discussed in Chapter 1, can be read in Freud’s work as being associated with both comfort and spirituality. Cupboards in the modern horror film are frequently used as a portal to another realm or location. Either ghosts escape from the afterlife via this womb-space, or it is a point of entry into the spiritual world. For example, in the haunted house film *House* (Steve Miner, 1986), protagonist Roger has to save his son who is trapped in a spiritual world accessed through the bathroom cabinet. In *Poltergeist* too, the cupboard in Carol Anne’s bedroom is the entrance to the spiritual world within the house where the daughter is being held. Diane has to pass through the cupboard in order to enter this realm, returning through a hole that appears in the

living room ceiling, curled up with her daughter in a foetal position and covered in an amniotic-like fluid. After this 'birth' back into the real world mother and daughter are plunged into a bath of water where they are reborn into reality. Not only is birth visually represented through the cervix-resembling hole in the ceiling, but also symbolically by the bath.⁵⁹ As well as being a point of access to a spiritual world, cupboards are also used as entrances to hidden spaces, usually containing secrets or allowing for the revelation of horrific truths. In *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1967) Rosemary discovers a secret door in her hall closet leading to the apartment of her devil worshipping neighbours, and once inside the horrific truth behind her own pregnancy and offspring is revealed.

This idea of a hidden space that allows for a revelation or key turning point in the film's plot links this use of the cupboard to its other role within these narratives, as a space in which to hide from an attack. One of the most famous scenes from John Carpenter's classic slasher film *Halloween* is when protagonist Laurie hides within a cupboard, only to be discovered by Michael Myers (the film's human monster). Clover calls these scenes – where the victim retreats to a confined space to escape the monster – 'the penetration scene'. She writes that it "is commonly the film's pivotal moment; if the victim has up to now simply fled, she now has no choice but to fight back".⁶⁰ This is where the enclosed space of the cupboard links with the bathroom. In both *The Shining* and *The Amityville Horror* a family has to hide within the confines of the bathroom as their possessed father tries to break down the door with an axe. The mother is forced at this point to fight back and risk harming her husband in order to save her children. I propose that these scenes represent the break from symbiotic

⁵⁹ Earlier on in the film Carol Anne is able to pass through the body of her mother, even though no one can see her, demonstrating that the spirit world that she occupies is still very much tied to the confines of the house. She does not occupy the physical space of the house, but the emotional one.

⁶⁰ Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, 31.

union with the mother. They form the critical point in the films' narratives where the protagonist or protagonists realise that the spaces such as the cupboard or the bathroom, or indeed the house, which they thought offered safety and protection, are actually dangerous due to their containment, and that they must escape its confines. It is at this moment that the protagonists move from being passive or defensive to active, mirroring the movement from the cared for child, to the independent adult. They learn that they must fight for themselves and move out from their hiding space into the wider world.



Figures 3.8 - 3.12: Wendy helps Danny escape from the possessed Jack (and from the symbiotic union)

In the case of the haunted house subgenre in particular, the maternal symbolism that litters these films supports this reading. Even though having the father as an antagonist – or a helpless figure as in the first *Poltergeist* film – entails that the mother must be the one to actively assist or defend her children, this merely eases the passage away from the symbiotic union. These women are often represented as naive and childlike. Kathy wears her hair in bunches tied up with ribbons and dresses like a schoolgirl. In Wendy Torrance's first scene in *The Shining* she is reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, a novel associated with adolescent readers, and later on in the film when she is being shown around the kitchen by Mr Halloran she exclaims that it is so big

that she feels she will need to “leave a trail of breadcrumbs” after her just to find her way out. The immaturity shown in Kathy and Wendy can be seen in Diane as well. She and her husband Steve smoke cannabis together and goof around in their bedroom. The sequel to the original film also features Diane’s mother, therefore portraying Diane as a daughter and child as well as a mother herself. Combined with this childlike naivety, these three women are also not the ‘supermothers’ idealised during the 1950s and 1960s.⁶¹ As well as her cannabis use, Diane regularly drinks alcohol (in fact, in *Poltergeist II* both husband and wife are rarely seen without a drink in their hand) and Kathy Lutz has three children from a previous marriage, a fact that she tries not to disclose to people.

The character of Wendy Torrance has been studied in more detail than either Kathy or Diane, but nearly always in relation to her husband. Wendy is depicted as a weak woman with a relaxed approach to motherhood. Before moving to the hotel mother and son are shown eating lunch in a cramped and messy apartment. She smokes whilst he watches violent cartoons on the television. When at the Overlook Danny often plays alone, whilst Wendy tends to her jobs or looks after Jack. Yet Wendy’s greatest ‘failure’ as a mother is covertly represented to be her inability to leave her marriage. The film’s viewers learn during a visit by mother and son to a doctor that five months previously Jack had grabbed Danny and dislocated his shoulder in a drunken rage. Even though Wendy attempts to convince the doctor (and herself) that Jack has changed and given up alcohol for good, as Frank Manchel argues, her body language and constant smoking suggest otherwise:

Wendy portrays the suffering wife, homebound, caught in a loveless marriage, and ineptly trying to keep the family together by suppressing any doubts about Jack’s or Danny’s mental health. This is Wendy’s

⁶¹ Ogden, *The Great American Housewife*, 171.

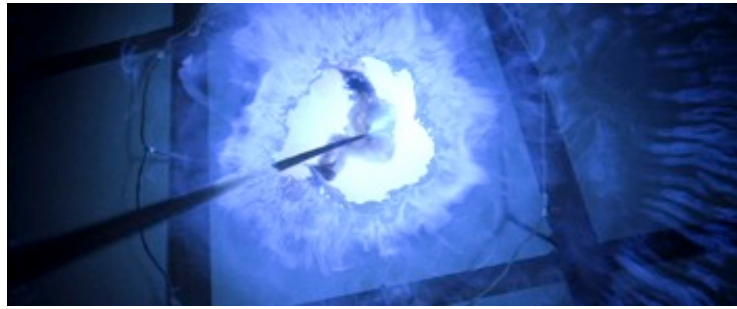
seduction by patriarchal authoritarianism. In her mind, that is what a good wife is supposed to do: wash, weep, and wait patiently.⁶²

Wendy has put her marriage to Jack and the demands of patriarchy's nuclear family ideal before the safety of her son, all for a husband who shows little remorse and next to no affection.

However, even with the maternal failings of Kathy, Diane and Wendy, it is they who ultimately have the power to thwart the evil that haunts them. Each woman is able to realise just in time that the person before them is not the husband that they know and love, and are able to save their children. As Leibowitz and Jeffress write in another piece focusing on the paternal in *The Shining*, in these works "it is the mothers who are distant enough, yet involved and aware enough, to see what is seducing their husbands and destroying their kids".⁶³ In the modern haunted house film, her acceptance of the ghosts that haunt her home ultimately protects the mother, whilst her disbelieving husband falls prey. One year before Jack Torrance chops through his bathroom door with an axe to get at Wendy and Danny, George Lutz chops through his own bathroom door in a possessed rage trying to attack his children. He is only stopped by his wife launching herself on him and bringing him out of his possession. Although in *The Shining* it is Danny who ultimately thwarts his father, it is his mother's bravery and willingness to put her son's safety before her own that enables this. In *Poltergeist* too, even though Steve does play a role in Carol Anne's rescue, it is her mother who nearly dies by entering the spirit world within the house and then is reborn through the ceiling having rescued her child.

⁶² Frank Manchel, 'What About Jack? Another Perspective on Family Relationships in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*,' *Literature Film Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1995): 74.

⁶³ Flo Leibowitz and Lynn Jeffress 'Review: *The Shining* by Stanley Kubrick,' *Film Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 51.



Figures 3.13, 3.14 and 3.15: Womb, vagina and birth symbolism in *Poltergeist*

Therefore Kathy, Diane and Wendy, all go through a process of transition either in a bathroom or cupboard as discussed above, or, in the case of Kathy, at the moment when the children are trapped in that space and need assistance getting out. It is at this point that these women change from being – to use Sarah Arnold’s terminology – ‘bad mothers’ to ‘good mothers’; they sacrifice their own safety to help their children.⁶⁴ A surface reading of these films presents these women as much needed examples of mother-heroines, risking their lives and using force to save others. But this potential feminist reading is undermined by the link between the home and the maternal in these works. These mothers may be saving their children, but they are ultimately saving them from the monstrous maternal force of the house. This is the

⁶⁴ Arnold, *Maternal Horror Film*, 5.

moment where they become ‘good mothers’ under patriarchal law. They assist with the separation of their children from the womb-space and help them enter the wider world safely.

Beyond the Freudian reading of houses, rooms and other structures symbolising the female body and womb, there are motifs and imagery in all three films that are inherently maternal. This is especially true in *The Amityville Horror*, where the house is clearly anthropomorphised into a devouring maternal body. The glowing attic windows turn its façade into a leering face at night, an image compounded in shots of one side of the building where the lower windows look like a toothy mouth when lit by flashes of lighting. The house looks as though it is literally going to eat its inhabitants. The idea of the house as being a body or person is also referred to in the juxtaposition of narrative and image. George’s reassuring statement to his wife that ‘houses don’t have memories’ is countered by the editing of the film, which continually intercuts images of the previous murders that took place in the house into the current timeline. It is also revealed that the evil spirits that haunt the house are entering through a blood-filled well in a secret room within the basement. The walls of this womb-like space are painted bright red as though with fresh blood. It is the malevolent forces that are born through this portal that have been possessing George, driving him slowly mad so that he will kill those he loves.

Along with the womb-like space of the red basement room, *The Amityville Horror* makes constant visual references to the maternal. This is most commonly done through the figure of the Virgin Mary, statues of whom cast their view over the evil events that unfold. Wife Kathy fills her house and even car with little icons of the Virgin Mother, and these are often positioned within the *mise en scène* to stand out in the framing of the shot. In many cases, these statues are turned away from the camera,

as though foreshadowing the church's refusal to assist the Lutz family, and the powerlessness of all attempts to dispel the spirits with Christian prayer. This ineffectiveness of Christianity is also represented in a scene from the height of George's possession when he has started to endanger his family's lives. Kathy is shown shouting down the phone to the priest, who is unable to hear her. Her repeated cries of 'Father, Father!' suggest that her call for assistance from God and the church is going unanswered, but also importantly the powerlessness of the paternal – represented by the church – in the face of the threat of the (maternal) house. This further supports the proposition of the house being *other* to the father – or patriarchy – and therefore feminine.

One scholar who does draw a link between the modern haunted house film and the maternal is Larrie Dudenhoeffer in his book *Embodiment and Horror Cinema*. Dudenhoeffer still reads *The Amityville Horror* as a narrative of a male subjected to an economic crisis, but he explores this through the analogy of the house as a menstruating womb that seeks to expel the subprime family that dwells within its walls.⁶⁵ This body of a house literally bleeds the family out, with blood running down the walls and gushing down the stairs. Dudenhoeffer notes how the climax of the film is not really a climax at all, for there is no real resolution to the narrative. After Kathy decides to launch her attack and George is freed from his possession the family just leave the house. They are unable to take on the evil spirits that possess the building so all they can do is run to freedom. The family is safe, George's patriarchal power re-established (he returned briefly to the house to rescue the dog and managed to survive falling into the well of blood), but the monstrous maternal house still remains monstrous.

⁶⁵ Larrie Dudenhoeffer, *Embodiment and Horror Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 84.



Figures 3.16 and 3.17: Houses that bleed

Dudenhoeffer's reading is limited to *The Amityville Horror*, yet this symbolic image of a menstruating or gestating house can be seen in both the other key haunted house films that I have discussed in this section, further strengthening the tie between the haunted house and the maternal. In all examples the vision of these houses bleeding or producing a bodily fluid-like substance comes after the penetration of the womb-space of a cupboard or bathroom and forms the turning point in the narrative. In *The Shining* Wendy is able to save Danny from Jack and the building itself by pushing him out the bathroom window. She momentarily fights off Jack, before he retreats. She then actively looks for Danny and it is at this point where she fully experiences the haunting of the house. She sees the ghost residents that dwell within it, before watching in horror as an elevator door opens up, gushing torrents of blood before her. Also in *Poltergeist*, after Diane's heroic rescue of Carol Anne the family tries to return to normality, and whilst the mother takes a bath another, even more vaginal,

opening appears in the space of the children's bedroom closet. Diane must save her children once more, before they get sucked into this deadly orifice forever.

Therefore, even though the haunted house subgenre counters much modern American horror cinema by having a monstrous father and a mother-hero, I propose that these films should still be read as deeply misogynistic, as the use of womb symbolism and the link between the home and the female reproductive body represents the maternal as monstrous. I believe that these mother-heroes should be read as 'good mothers' under patriarchy, assisting their children in the break from the abjectivity of their own bodies and the potentially deadly symbiotic union. They save their children from the monstrous womb that is their own homes. One factor that is particularly interesting is that in *The Amityville Horror* and *The Shining*, there is no full resolution of patriarchal power. The house is not purged of its maternal monstrosity, and the family can only escape. This marks the horror of the maternal body as something that is ever-lasting and indestructible. But where does this violent abhorrence come from and why is it given such weight? The particular power and vehemence of the representation of maternity and the female body as monstrous actually appears to suggest that it is a defensive act against the primary love for the mother. This love is simultaneously so strong, but so threatening to patriarchal phallocentrism, that it can never be fully repressed, and so continually reappears in the oppression of the maternal. But is this still the case in a contemporary America that has seen some growth in the equality between the sexes? Moving both backwards and forwards in time, the next section will use Karen Horney's exploration of why men find women so horrific to analyse the perseverance of womb phantasies and womb symbolism in American occult horror cinema, and to question whether the

representation of the maternal and the female reproductive organs has changed at all in the last forty years.

“It Was Here When We Moved In”: Retro-Horror and Karen Horney’s ‘Dread of Woman’

In ‘The Dread of Woman’ Karen Horney argues that throughout history men have used art to express the duality of their feelings towards women: “Men have never tired of fashioning expressions for this experience: the violent force by which the man feels himself drawn to the woman, and, side by side with his longing, the dread lest through her he might be undone.”⁶⁶ Citing examples from poetry and literature, Horney describes how water is commonly used to express the volatile pull towards a woman that men both fight against and are captivated by, arguing that it is a primal element that threatens to swallow up any who enter. Horney contends that men try to battle this combination of fear and desire through the objectification of women. She writes: “‘It is not’ he says, ‘that I dread her; it is that she herself is malignant, capable of any crime, a beast of prey, a vampire, a witch, insatiable in her desires. She is the very personification of everything that is sinister’”.⁶⁷ Horney believes that this sinister nature of woman is multiplied when her womanhood is at its most pronounced: at times of menstruation. In other words, it is a woman’s maternity that is at the root of her monstrosity. This section will move forward from the modern horrors of the 1960s-1990s to the recent resurgence in post-modern retro-occult horror that has dominated American box offices between 2009 and 2014. Taking *The Conjuring* as a case study it will evaluate how the representation of maternity has changed since the first cycle of these films, arguing that Horney’s theory of the dread of woman is

⁶⁶ Horney, ‘The Dread of Woman,’ 349.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

mirrored in the formal and thematic qualities of these works through their reliance on maternal narratives and womb symbolism.

Retro-occult films – combining possession, haunted house and satanic plots – look back to the occult films of the 1970s and 1980s, emulating them stylistically and narratively. Offering a return to more classical narratives after the popularity of the torture porn and found-footage subgenres, these films often forgo overt gore and excessive use of sudden scares in favour of more traditional ghost plots, family settings, and creepy props.⁶⁸ Many of the works are set between the 1960s and 1980s, and some – such as Ti West’s *The House of the Devil* (Ti West, 2009), go to great lengths to recreate the aesthetic of their original source material. West filmed *The House of the Devil* in 16mm, and relied heavily on static camera positions or slow zooms and pans to recreate the feel of earlier horror films, whilst also making the film appear markedly different from the jarring camera movements of many found-footage films that populated the market previously.

These retro-occult films have achieved a high level of success at the American box office, as well as popularity around the world. James Wan’s *The Conjuring* was the nineteenth most successful film in domestic cinemas for the year of its release, grossing nearly \$140,000,000 nationally on a budget of an estimated \$20,000,000.⁶⁹ Wan is no stranger to box office success, being one half of the partnership behind one of the most popular horror franchises of all time – the *Saw* films. Wan has directed three of the most successful horror films of this period, including *Insidious* (2010), *The Conjuring* (2013) and *Insidious Chapter 2* (2013), whilst also producing *The Conjuring* spin-off and prequel *Annabelle* (John R. Leonetti, 2014). Of the retro-

⁶⁸ Exceptions to this are contemporary exorcism films, which can be more gruesome and in certain examples, exhibit the same revelry in bodily destruction as the torture porn subgenre.

⁶⁹ Box Office Mojo, ‘2013 Domestic Grosses,’ accessed September 1, 2015.
<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2013&p=.htm>.

horror subgenre it is these four films that have most clearly displayed the continued fascination of ‘occult narratives in family settings’ for American cinemagoers. Wan is a Malaysian-born Australian who has resided in America since the success of his first feature film *Saw* (James Wan, 2004). He is an example of the large numbers of international directors working in American horror cinema, and some of the most popular American films and franchises of the last decade have been produced by directors born outside of the country. The *Paranormal Activity* franchise was created by Israeli born director Oren Peli, whilst French director Alexandre Aja helmed the popular remakes *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006, based on Wes Craven’s 1977 film of the same name) and *Mirrors* (2008), based on the Korean film *Geoul sokeuro* (*Into the Mirror*, Kim Sung-ho, 2003). Within the retro-occult subgenre, German filmmaker Daniel Stamm directed and edited *The Last Exorcism* (2010), a found-footage-occult crossover, and *The Haunting in Connecticut* (2009) was directed by the Australian Peter Cornwell. These directors all now live in America, working on American productions that are set in the country itself. They reflect Hollywood’s history as a home to international directors, and would present a significant gap in any research on the country’s horror cinema if they were to be omitted.

Wan’s *The Conjuring* is based on the real-life American paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren, who were involved in investigating the haunting of the Lutz family that went on to be depicted in *The Amityville Horror*. Following many of the same motifs as the occult films of the 1970s and 1980s, *The Conjuring* is set shortly before the Amityville haunting and tells the story of the Perron family who have recently moved into a dilapidated country house. However, *The Conjuring* presents one significant contrast to the haunted house films discussed earlier that act as its source material: it is the mother who is possessed not the father. This time it is

Carolyn who tries to kill her children, even though she is the one who is more receptive to the presence of the ghosts than her husband. This shift can be seen across the retro-occult subgenre as a whole, with men, women and children all being regularly represented as possessed. Roles appear more fluid in these new films, with mother and father heroes and antagonists, male and female psychics, and evil spirits of both genders. Nevertheless, some of the key symbolic elements and narrative subtexts of *The Conjuring* and other works like it, are similar to those found in the earlier films, stressing the need for a symptomatic reading exploring the role of the maternal and the womb.



Figure 3.18: The haunted cupboard in *The Conjuring*

As with the haunted house films discussed earlier, the two key haunting sites in *The Conjuring* are the cellar and a cupboard. These two spaces are in fact interlinked in the film right from the start, when the family discovers the boarded-up basement by chance after a hole is made in the broom-cupboard wall. The bedroom cupboard however, is the prime site of spiritual interaction. On the second night in the house one of the daughters, Cindy, who is a sleepwalker, wakes her older sister Andrea by entering her bedroom and repeatedly banging her head against a large wooden wardrobe. The next day Carolyn and her youngest daughter April play a game of hide and clap together, and the blindfolded mother is led to the cupboard by a succession of claps that come from within, only to find that her daughter was hiding in another room. Later on Carolyn is drawn down into the cellar by the sound of laughter, and

then trapped inside by the evil spirit. At the same time the ghost in the cupboard attacks Cindy and her sister in Andrea's bedroom. As the haunting continues Cindy again sleepwalks into her sister's bedroom and reveals a secret passageway behind the cupboard. Lorraine enters the passage, but falls through the floorboards down into the cellar, where she sees the ghost of another woman who had been possessed by Bathsheba and sacrificed her child before hanging herself. Therefore the cellar is accessed via two cupboards (the broom-cupboard and the bedroom wardrobe) reinforcing the proposition that these domestic spaces act as portals to the spiritual realm. I propose that in contemporary American horror cinema, as it was thirty years previously, it is the hidden spaces of the family home that stand as symbolic equivalents to the maternal. People are drawn to these spaces, even when they are aware of the horrors that lie within; they are an inescapable spiritual (maternal) force that defies the rationality of (paternal) real life. This could represent not only the fear of rejoining the mother in the symbiotic union, but also unconscious worries surrounding male heterosexual desire which involves an entry into that hidden space.

In 'The Dread of Woman' Horney attempts to explain why the female genitals are such a source of anxiety for men. She questions whether the lethargy – and even death in the case of some species – that exists after mating has an effect on these feelings:

Are love and death more closely bound up with one another for the male than for the female, in whom sexual union potentially produces a new life? Does the man feel, side by side with his desire to conquer, a secret longing for extinction in the act of reunion with the woman (mother)? Is it perhaps this longing which underlies the 'death instinct'? And is it his will to live which reacts to it with anxiety?⁷⁰

There are two key issues at play here. First Horney highlights the desire to return to the symbiotic union that presents itself during heterosexual sex – where the man re-occupies a woman's body – therefore presenting the sex act itself as an interaction

⁷⁰ Horney, 'The Dread of Woman,' 353.

with, or playing out of, a womb phantasy. The man wishes to conquer the woman he penetrates, but he also retains the narcissistic impulse to be her total object of love: to re-enter the symbiotic union. Further to this, whereas the sex act presents the opportunity for a woman to experience once more the symbiotic union with her own mother through her bond with her child (as Chodorow argues), for the man the creation of a new life would actually take him one step further away from this union, as the infant would come in-between him and his mother-substitute partner. Subsequently in this reading sex is synonymous with the womb phantasy. It allows for the closest possible reconnection with the mother's body, and for a moment a symbiotic union is created between two partners, yet it also presents the opportunity for this union to be broken by the creation of a third party, a child. Whereas for the woman this child presents a further opportunity for the living out of the womb phantasy, for the man it reinforces the impossibility of his desires, leading him to reject them as dreadful.⁷¹

'The Dread of Woman' was a critical work in Horney's battle against Freud. Released the year that she moved to the United States, the piece was, in Dee Garrison's words: "a strong, even bitter and vicious, attack which set Freudian theory on its ear."⁷² In this essay Horney challenges Freud's development of the sexes. She proposes that when a young girl sees her father's penis she instinctually knows that

⁷¹ Horney was highly skeptical of Freud's theory of the death drive, and along with his ideas on feminine psychology it compounded her need to move away from Freudian thought and forge a new path in psychoanalysis (see: Karen Horney, *New Ways in Psychoanalysis* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1939)). Her discussion of the simultaneous male desire for, and rejection of, the female aligns with the viewpoint taken in this thesis that patriarchy must label woman as monstrous, weak or pathetic on one hand, whilst celebrating the maternal on the other, in order to bolster its own position in power. Horney's argument that sex and death could hold more sway with a man than with a woman supports the proposition I made in Chapter 1 that the linking of the maternal and death as seen in Freud's theory of the death instinct is more of a patriarchal construction than a universal drive. Here again, Freud's understanding of the womb phantasy – first as one of Oedipal desire and later as one of a return to origins resulting in death – is shown as easily crumbling under feminist critique, whilst a theory of the womb phantasy as a desire to return to the symbiotic union with the loving mother works across genders, cultures and sexualities.

⁷² Dee Garrison, 'Karen Horney and Feminism,' *Signs* 6, no. 4 (Summer 1981): 684.

she is meant to be penetrated, but fears that it is too large. She therefore turns away from any feelings of desire through the fear that her genitals may be damaged and through a desire to keep them intact. However, the young boy, upon witnessing his mother's sexual organs, knows that he is to penetrate them, but realises that he is far too small. Horney contends that this makes the boy feel inadequate and physically inferior, thus the threat that the female genitals incite is not one of castration, but humiliation. Therefore, she contends that whereas both sexes may experience anxiety during this early stage in their sexual development, girls are able to keep their physical integrity and move on, whereas it is actually boys who can suffer a deep-seated and incurable wound to their narcissism, a wound that will continue to influence their feelings towards women for the rest of their life.

Horney contends that this wound causes men in later life to objectify and demean women in order to subdue and to feel superior over them. She further argues that men tend to choose childlike and meek wives in order to appease their own anxiety, thus replicating this disposition in women. Henry Jenkins explains that this encourages a form of hypermasculinity in order to negate the fear of being humiliated:

The boy fears that his claim towards masculinity may be a bad joke, and often reacts in rage and self-aggrandizement – hypermasculinity. Hypermasculine masquerade exaggerates the myth of male potency, strength, hardness, rigidity, and masks the male's fundamental sense of his own ridiculousness. The phallus, as a symbolic and mythic structure, compensates for the inadequacies and vulnerabilities of the penis.⁷³

Jenkins points out that in her focus on the polarization of woman in the mind of man, Horney fails to pay due attention to the corresponding duality created in men, that of hero and self-abasing *other*. Although this may be the case with other film genres, such as the action or thriller film, the retro-occult film offers little space for

⁷³ Henry Jenkins, "'The laughingstock of the City': Performance Anxiety, Male Dread and Unfaithfully Yours,' in *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), 244.

hypermasculinity. Instead masculinity is often threatened as male characters realise that physical strength and single-mindedness will not help them when facing a spiritual threat. Exorcism films such as *Deliver us From Evil* (Scott Derrickson, 2014) *The Last Exorcism*, and *The Last Exorcism Part 2* (Ed Gass-Donnelly, 2013) display men battling this realisation, often when confronted by the contorting body of a woman gripped by demonic possession. Nevertheless, retro-occult films do offer the opportunity for a male-hero, such as in the *Insidious* franchise, and Derrickson's *Sinister* (Scott Derrickson, 2012). In these works the fathers do not rescue their families with hypermasculine strength or cunning, but by embracing the spiritual, the side usually occupied by women. Interestingly too, although he may not be possessed, in these examples the father is to some extent to blame for the threat that his family is placed under in the first place. In the *Insidious* films the gift of spiritual projection is passed down from father to son, putting the child's life in danger. In *Sinister* too, when the father discovers a box of snuff films in the attic of his new house (that he requested his family move in to), it is his watching of these films that allows the evil spirit to enter into the living world.

As with *The Amityville Horror*, *The Shining* and *Poltergeist*, in *Insidious* and *The Conjuring* it is the mother rather than the father who is first willing to accept that her family home is haunted, and she suffers from a large proportion of the ghostly interactions. Simultaneously, in the marriage of Ed and Lorraine in *The Conjuring*, it is Lorraine who possesses psychic senses and is able to see into the past, whereas her husband can only intervene when ghosts reveal themselves to him. The bond of motherhood unites Carolyn and Lorraine, and is key to Carolyn's survival. When the Warrens visit the house to collect evidence of the haunting the two women stop to look at a photo of the Perron family at the beach. Lorraine's psychic ability allows her

to grasp moments from the day that the photo was taken, expressing how happy they all must have felt. Carolyn fondly recalls how the family was at the beach before the move, getting ready for a “fresh start, a new house, a new beginning”. They smile as they think about the positivity associated with this chance for a re-birth, but their faces then are moved to sadness as the Perron’s current predicament is remembered. The two women are physically quite similar, and as they bond over the shared experience of the joy of motherhood, Wan’s framing and editing formally unites them as well. This shot/reverse shot sequence compiled of shots that use gentle zooms in towards each woman, connects the pair in the process of remembering and envisaging. What they are sharing is not that particular moment, but the love that a mother has for her family. It is this love that Lorraine uses to help Carolyn free herself of her possession. When Ed’s attempt to exorcise Bathsheba fails, he shouts that he needs Carolyn to fight from the inside. Using her abilities, Lorraine projects the moment of that day at the beach into Carolyn’s mind, imploring her to remember how much she loves her children. The film cuts between images of the family at the beach and shots of Carolyn in a state of semi-possession. Still showing the physical signs of possession (a white face, unkempt hair and peeling skin), the woman begins to cry. Non-diegetic choral music fills the score and she is lit from below using a white light. These compositional elements all appear to create a figure that resides half in heaven as an angel, and half in hell as a monstrous spirit. As Carolyn struggles to free herself from the grasp of Bathsheba she looks up at Lorraine’s hand that grasps her head as though in a religious rapture. But it is not God that is freeing her from this state of damnation, but her own maternity.



Figure 3.19: Carolyn's maternal rapture

This image of one mother helping another through the re-establishment of maternal love is an interesting counterpoint to the misogyny of the previous cycle of haunted house films. Even though in these new films the haunted home is still represented as a maternal space, and women are still seen as having an innate connection to the spiritual (as opposed to the men who are regarded as exceptions due to their psychic ability), there is something in this female driven conclusion that I believe represents a more progressive stance. During her possession Carolyn fully embodies the monstrous biological mother, threatening to devour her children through their death. But through the realignment of her mythical maternity with her biological body she is able to reconnect with her children rather than guide them away. It is as though matriarchal power has shed the image of the monstrous mother thrust on it by patriarchy and replaced it with a more 'whole' mother combining both physical body and mythical maternity. The desire to return to the womb may still be problematic (due to the monstrous womb symbolism of the house), but the love for the mother and the acceptance of her power is more openly experienced.

Conclusion

In the conclusion to her essay Horney argues that the key method for men to cover over their fear of – and I propose also the desire of – the maternal womb, and the wound to their narcissism that has come about from their vision of the mother's

genitals, is an attack on the self-respect of women.⁷⁴ She proposes that patriarchy sustains its power by encouraging men to choose child-like and emotional women, which in turn cultivates that sex to be more child-like and more emotional. This does certainly appear to be the case in the narratives of modern American haunted house films, where the women are indeed immature and naïve. This childlike woman will not pose the same threat of the monstrous mother of *Psycho*, *Friday the 13th* and *Carrie* of locking her child/husband into a devouring symbiotic union. A key component of this subjugation of women is forcing the split into the biological body, which is seen as monstrous, and the mythical maternal that is loving but ultimately powerless. The womb straddles this binary as both organ and symbol of maternal love. An analysis of womb symbolism in these films has allowed for counter-readings that explore these narratives as stories of the break from the symbiotic union that is represented as potentially deadly by patriarchal society if it is not rejected. Societal oppression of the mother and repression of the love for her enables the suppression of women and maintains a culture built on shoring up the continued power of the phallus. Yet in the recent retro-horror subgenre the fluidity of previously defined gender associations has allowed for moments where women are able to work together to use maternity for good; to save their children through a realignment of their mythical nature with their biological body. Although these films still represent a fear of the maternal body, the love for the mother and a mother's love for her child – both symbolised by the womb (as a pre-natal and post-natal site of symbiotic union) – breaks through more clearly, allowing for a more progressive representation of maternity.

⁷⁴ Horney, 'The Dread of Woman,' 360.

Chapter 4

Mother-Power, Non-Mothers and the Mother Bond: South Korea

This chapter focuses on the depiction of mother-child relationships in the Korean horror cinema of the 1960s and early 2000s.¹ The first section will propose that *Hanyo* (*The Housemaid*, Kim Ki-young, 1960), *Maewi gyedan* (*The Devil's Stairway*, Lee Man-hee, 1964) and *Pon* (*Phone*, Ahn Byung-ki, 2002) clearly define the difference between the mythical self-sacrificing mother willing to do anything for her child, and the woman who is denied the chance to mother, and therefore positioned as the abject and monstrous avenger. However, this woman is also a sympathetic character who occupies a socially sanctioned form of monstrosity as she has been unable to achieve what Korean society sees as the ultimate goal for women: maternity. Combining research on *mo-jeong* (the bond between mother and child) and the traditional practice of *taegyo* (pre-natal stimulation and care) I propose that the manner in which a Korean mother is encouraged by varying cultural influences to relate to the baby in her womb results in a womb phantasy that forms the basis of the Korean group-orientated society.² This chapter will then show through an in-depth analysis of Kim Jee-woon's *A Tale of Two Sisters* how even with this culturally specific relationship between mother and child in mind, the same key womb symbols and ideas surrounding the maternal reproductive abilities that were seen in America, France and Freudian theory, remain.

¹ This study engages with the cinema and psychoanalytic theory of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and not the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). Although somewhat problematic, this thesis will follow in the practice of referring to the Republic of Korea simply as Korea. All names are presented in the Korean format of surname first, unless the person identifies him or herself using the Western format.

² Due to the relative infancy of psychoanalysis in Korea and a lack of English translations of existing texts, some work included in this chapter will be taken from psychiatric research, but emphasis will be laid on the involvement of psychoanalytic theory in the development of psychiatry in Korea, as well as on how psychoanalysis, and Freudian psychoanalytic theory in particular, is integrated into more clinical therapies.

A New Frontier: The International Language of Horror and the Unconscious

The Korean psychoanalyst Lee Moo-suk argues that in the same manner that humans both in the East and West use material to clothe themselves – albeit in different fashions – all humans share a “human condition”, but with culturally unique manifestations.³ Lee argues that there is no difference between people from the East and West in regard to their basic human biology and instincts: they share sexual and aggressive drives, have a common first relationship with their mothers, and have the same base human emotions. He writes: “It is my opinion... that if we listen to the individuals’ basic internal experiences through psychoanalytic theories of mind, we will find significant commonalities in those from the West and the East, regardless of their cultural differences.”⁴ Lee contends that psychoanalysis is the study of the *inner* experiences of human beings, therefore applicable to all humans, believing that the influence of exterior or cultural forces is but one aspect to the process. Therefore he suggests that there is a universal convergence and divergence of psychoanalysis. The convergence of psychoanalysis is that it is applicable to all humans as it studies their inner being. The divergence of psychoanalysis on the other hand lies in the need to recognise culturally specific ways in which psychoanalytic therapy is approached and experienced.

This need for cultural specificity can manifest itself in three interlinked ways: an engagement with the contextual importance of current culture and society on the psyche and neuroses, a look back at the specific history of a nation to try to understand why such a society has come into being, and an acceptance of the possibility of transference on the part of the analyst in how they understand the

³ Lee Moo-suk, ‘Korean Culture and Psychoanalysis’ in *Psychoanalysis in Asia: China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan* ed. by Maria Teresa Savio Hooke, Sverre Varvin and Alf Gerlach (London: Karnac, 2013), 197.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

patient, symptom or area of interest. Karen Horney claimed that her move to America entrenched in her mind the importance of cultural variations when studying the psyche.⁵ In *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, Horney argues that attention should not just be paid to the role and importance of childhood events in the formation of neuroses, but why these might have occurred and how these early experiences interact with, and react to, events in later life:

When we focus our attention on the actual neurotic difficulties we recognize that neuroses are generated not only by incidental individual experiences, but also by the specific cultural conditions under which we live. In fact the cultural conditions not only lend weight and colour to the individual experiences but in the last analysis determine their particular form. It is an individual fate, for example, to have a domineering or a 'self-sacrificing' mother, but it is only under definite cultural conditions that we find domineering or self-sacrificing mothers, and it is only because of these existing conditions that such an experience will have an influence on later life.⁶

Horney argues that following Freudian theory without reference to these cultural variations could result in “stagnation” and “the danger of tending to find in neuroses what Freud’s theories lead one to expect to find”.⁷ She contends that psychoanalysis must venture out beyond just Freud’s work, whilst still holding the importance of the unconscious and the use of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic treatment at its core.

Maria Teresa Savio Hooke, Sverre Varvin and Alf Gerlach write in their introduction to *Psychoanalysis in Asia: China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan* that in a modern Western world where psychoanalysis is struggling to maintain its position as a method of treatment, in the East a “new frontier” is opening up and embracing fresh forms of the practice.⁸ Published in 2013, this edited collection of essays from Eastern and Western scholars and psychoanalysts demonstrates not only

⁵ Horney, *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*, 12-13.

⁶ Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (New York: Norton, 1937), viii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁸ Maria Teresa Savio Hooke, Sverre Varvin and Alf Gerlach, ‘Introduction: Why a Book on Psychoanalysis in Asia?’ *Psychoanalysis in Asia*, xiii.

the breadth of psychoanalytic work being carried out in Asia, but also the challenges that many of those in the East have faced. Even though – as will be demonstrated in the next chapter – Japan has a deeply established field of clinical and theoretical psychoanalytic research that began during the early decades of the twentieth century, the introduction of Freud’s work to countries such as Korea, China and Taiwan has been far more slow-moving and has only started to gain momentum in the last two decades. As scholars of Asian psychoanalysis have stressed, this is not due to the inability of psychoanalysis to be used to treat patients in these Eastern cultures, but instead it is because of more practical reasons such as periods of colonialism, dictatorship and war that have hindered the introduction of new ideas, and importantly, a lack of fully certified analysts who are able to train others.⁹ To become a certified practicing psychoanalyst a student must undertake years of analysis themselves before analysing others, and therefore if a recognised psychoanalyst with the authority to train is not in the country, it is impossible to educate others unless they migrate to another part of the world. It is for these reasons that psychoanalysis in Korea can still be considered as being in its infancy when compared to the more established history that can be seen in Japan, even though the latter occupied the former when it was forming its own psychoanalytic roots.

In their summary of the history of psychoanalysis in Korea, Jeong Do-un and David Sachs argue that the approach has passed through three main stages in its continuing development.¹⁰ Although an awareness of Freud and his work can be seen in national newspapers and magazines in the early half of the 20th century, it was not until the

⁹ See Frances Thomson-Salo, ‘Panel Report - The World is Looking East: Growth and Development of Psychoanalysis in the Asian Region,’ *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 94, no. 6 (2013): 1205-1207; and Charles P. Fisher, ‘Panel Report - Psychoanalysis in the Pacific Rim,’ *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 77, no. 2 (1996): 373-377.

¹⁰ Jeong Do-un and David Sachs, ‘Psychoanalysis in Korea,’ in *Freud and the Far East: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on the People and Culture of China, Japan, and Korea* ed. Salman Akhtar (Plymouth: Jason Aronson, 2009), 27-41.

Korean War and the influx of American soldiers that psychoanalysis started to take hold in the country. For this reason Jeong and Sachs argue that 1957 can be considered to be the first historical year of psychoanalysis in Korea. To commemorate Freud's 101st anniversary, the Korean Neuropsychiatric Association held a day-long symposium on psychoanalysis attended by nearly 2500 people. The interest in this event demonstrated the shift from the German-influenced descriptive psychiatry that had previously dominated Korean treatment, to a more American style of psychodynamic psychiatry. However, the growth of psychoanalysis was incredibly slow due to the lack of fully trained analysts working in the country able to train others. Therefore psychoanalysis remained largely as a personal interest for doctors and psychiatrists working in Korea rather than as a fully qualified therapeutic process.¹¹

In 1980 the second period for Korean psychoanalysis began with the formation of a psychoanalytic study group in Seoul, which later became the Korean Association of Psychoanalysis (KAPA). Even during this period there was no means to gain psychoanalytic training in Korea and instead the group resorted to inviting scholars from around the world to lead workshops and seminars. In a decade when countries in the West were starting to fall out of love with psychoanalysis, Korea still did not have even one fully certified practising and training analyst. Additionally, even with the establishment of the study group, Korea did not have an official relationship with the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) and were therefore “psychoanalytic

¹¹ Jeong and Sachs neglect to mention that there were a few trained analysts in Korea during the middle of the twentieth century. For example Sung Hee Kim trained and was analyzed in Japan under Kosawa Heisaku, and returned to teach psychiatry at Chonnam University Medical School in the 1940s, however he was not a member of the IPA nor was he able to train new analysts. Geoffrey H. Blowers, ‘Korea, and Psychoanalysis,’ in *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy, and Culture* ed. by Edward Erwin (London: Routledge, 2002), 309-310.

orphans without surrogate parents to take care of them”.¹² It was not until 1991 when the IPA recognised KAPA as its first guest Study Group, and in 1997 that Strachey’s *Standard Edition* was published in Korean. The group built relationships with institutions in the West so that students were able to travel abroad to study and receive analysis. In 2004 Jeong and Hong Tak-yoo became the first Korean members of the IPA, followed by Yu Jae-hak, Kim Mee-kyung, and Lee Moo-suk, totalling five members by 2008.¹³ In that same year the IPA fully recognised KAPA and it was promoted to formal Study Group status. A year later in 2009, KAPA was at last able to set up an analytic training course to produce IPA certified psychoanalysts in Korea, initiating the third and current period of psychoanalysis in the country.

The continued determination of KAPA to become an Allied Centre of the IPA, and the constant stream of applications by Korean students wanting to train as analysts demonstrates not only a continued interest in psychoanalysis, but also that there is a position and desire for the therapy in Eastern cultures. Simultaneously, this increasing popularity of psychoanalysis in the country supports the project of this thesis and its use of psychoanalytic theory to trace the womb phantasy across the world. The basic understanding of the womb phantasy presented across this thesis is based upon some of the most fundamental psychoanalytic concepts: phantasy, the significance of childhood experiences, and the importance of relationship with the mother in the creation of the sense of self. If these concepts are deemed to be relevant by citizens of a country in relation to their own psyche, and attention is paid to where there is a divergence of thought in relation to psychoanalytic theory, then the reading of films using psychoanalysis can escape from the critique of being labelled as universalising.

¹² Jeong and Sachs, ‘Psychoanalysis in Korea,’ 36.

¹³ Korean Association of Psychoanalysis, ‘History and Aim,’ accessed September 1 2015, <http://new.freud.or.kr/eng/about/index.html>

Across the psychoanalytic research that has been carried out (usually by psychiatrists with an interest in psychoanalysis) the Oedipus complex and its manifestation in Korea has been a major concern. Kim Kwang-iel suggests that the Oedipus complex is applicable to Korea, but it is manifested in a culturally distinct form.¹⁴ Turning away from the myth of Oedipus, Kim looks to Korean mythology and folklore in order to explain the formation of the Korean family dynamic. He argues that these traditional myths and tales do not feature patricide, as conflict between father and son is instead resolved through a number of means: a peaceful assumption of the father's power, the displacement of the hostility onto a father substitute or totem, the mother acting as a mediator bringing father and son together, the sublimation of the emotion into filial piety, or the killing of the father by a higher power. In these Korean myths there is no suggestion of incest, with Kim arguing that instead these desires are sublimated or symbolised. However, he does contend that with the growing nuclearisation of the Korean family, increased sexual freedom, and the disintegration of both society and the bond between generations, a more Western version of the Oedipal conflict is starting to appear.

Both Lee and Kim argue that a potential reason for the turn away from conflict towards reconciliation and sublimation in the country's myths could be due to the importance of *hyao* (filial piety) to the Korean sensibility. *Hyao* is the sense of the child's duty towards their parents, and it is a responsibility that is felt very strongly in the country so should be considered during analysis and psychoanalytic theorisation. Kim argues that *hyao* reduces Oedipal tension between father and son, whilst also sublimating any incestuous desire for the mother. He contends that it "is not a

¹⁴ Kim Kwang-iel, 'The Oedipus Complex in Our Changing Society: with Special Reference to Korea,' *Journal of Korean Neuropsychiatric Association* 17, no. 1 (1978): 97-103 (In Korean).

compulsory duty which a child feels he is obliged to fulfil, but an attitude that he takes as natural”.¹⁵ He writes:

Hyao is a concept not of duty by one generation towards the other, but a reciprocal emotive component between generations, with the respect accorded by the children to the parents being balanced by the responsibility and understanding which the parents are expected to direct towards their children.¹⁶

Lee formulates the importance of *hyao* even more simplistically, declaring that “parents are meant to love their children, and children are meant by nature to feel grateful to their parents”.¹⁷ But what happens when parents do not love their children, or act in ways that could be considered irresponsible, hurtful, or even dangerous to their offspring? What if the father is weak rather than supportive, or the mother mad? Korean horror cinema is abundant with narratives where traditional family values such as *hyao*, paternal strength and maternal devotion are troubled, tested and broken apart.

In their introduction to the book *Korean Horror Cinema*, Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin argue that even though ghosts have featured in Korean cinema from as early as 1924, when the first adaptation of ‘The Story of Jang-hwa and Hong-ryeon’ was released (*Janghwa Hongryeon-jeon*, Kim Yeong-hwan, 1924), the horror genre proper in Korea did not exist until the 1960s.¹⁸ One of the main reasons for this (as with the introduction of psychoanalysis) was the tumultuous political history of the country over the last 150 years, including its colonisation by Japan, and the Korean War. Until the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, the country was known in the West as the ‘Hermit Kingdom’ due to its unwillingness to engage in trade and

¹⁵ Kim Kwang-iel, ‘Culture and Psychoanalysis in Korea,’ *Journal of the Korean Psychoanalytic Society* 11, no. 2 (2000): 183.

¹⁶ Kim, ‘Culture and Psychoanalysis in Korea,’ 183.

¹⁷ Lee Moo-suk, ‘The Father Figure in Korean Mind and Psychopathology in Terms of Father-Son Relationship,’ (sic) *Journal of the Korean Psychoanalytic Society* 11, no. 2 (2000): 286.

¹⁸ Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin, ‘Introduction,’ in *Korean Horror Cinema* ed. Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 3-4.

diplomatic relations.¹⁹ During the Japanese colonisation of Korea, the cultural production of the country operated under the strict control of Japan, with cinema being used predominantly as a tool of propaganda rather than artistic endeavour. Although Japan's defeat in the Second World War saw the lifting of these strict controls, Korean culture was not given time to blossom due to the split administration of North and South Korea between Soviet and American bodies. The politics of the Cold War furthered the division between the two halves of Korea through the establishment of two separate governments in 1948. In 1950 North Korea then invaded South Korea, leading to the Korean War in which over one million people died and many of the cities in both countries were destroyed.

Even after the end of the Korean War in 1953, South Korea still suffered from political upheaval. The presidency of Rhee Syngman from 1948 began the process of the modernisation of Korea, but he was forced to resign by the student protests of 1960 that demonstrated against his prolonged control and alleged election rigging.²⁰ Rhee was replaced by Korea's first democratic government led by Prime Minister Chong Myon, which cleared the way for a new constitution and a free press, as well as more freedom from censorship in the film industry. However, the initial positivity and enthusiasm created by this political change was quickly troubled by an accompanying economic downturn and more political turmoil. In May 1961 a military coup was led by Colonel Park Chung-hee, installing Park as President, where he would remain until his assassination in 1979. Although Park held strict control over the country, his jurisdiction did encourage the rapid modernisation of Korea and its economic development that continued after his death. This period of 'compressed modernity' in Korea – although fraught with political upheaval and economic

¹⁹ Tyler Dennett, 'In Due Course,' *Far Eastern Survey* 14, no.1 (Jan 1945): 1-4.

²⁰ Kim Jinwung, *A History of Korea: From "Land of the Morning Calm" to States in Conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 427-428.

instability (including the devastating IMF crisis of 1997) – rapidly moved the country from its early isolation to being one of the most developed countries in the world.²¹

Unsurprisingly, Korea's cinematic output has been tied closely to the country's political, social and economic history, and as such, the production and popularity of horror cinema in Korea has moved in cycles, peaking in the 1960s and 2000s. The catalyst for the first cycle was Kim Ki-Young's *The Housemaid*, which had a similar transformative effect and ongoing influence on the genre as *Psycho* did on American horror cinema. Made in the small window of relaxed censorship during the 1960 democratic government, the narrative of *The Housemaid*, was shocking to its contemporary audience, and it is still one of the most widely discussed Korean films of all time.²² The films of this first horror cycle started by *The Housemaid* featured predominantly supernatural plots of avenging *wonhon* (female ghosts).²³ These works clearly reveal the influence of the social and economic situation of Korea at the time of their production, with plots that focus on the family, modernity and attacks on the home.

Peirce and Martin argue that the 1980s were a 'dark time' in Korean cinema.²⁴ In the case of the horror genre, audiences were attracted to imported films from the West and from China, rather than the cheaply made and exploitative local productions created under the influence of the '3S' policy. This policy saw the relaxation of the censorship of erotic content, and the encouragement of 'sports, screen and sex' in

²¹ Korea rates higher than the United States and Japan in the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2012. *The Economist*, 'Democracy Index 2012: Democracy at a Standstill,' (2013) accessed 1 September 2015, https://portonev.gov.cv/dhub/porton.por_global.open_file?p_doc_id=1034
For more information on Korea's rapid modernization see Chang Kyung-sup, 'Compressed Modernity and its Discontents: South Korean Society in Transition,' *Economy and Society* 28, no. 1 (February 1999), 30-55.

²² Examples of this research are included later on in this chapter.

²³ The 1960s also saw the emergence of the Korean giant monster subgenre with films such as *Taegoesoo Yonggari* (*Yongary, Monster from the Deep*, Kim Kee-deok, 1967) and *Woojoogoein wangmagwi* (*Space Monster Wangmagwi*, Kwon Hyeok-jin, 1967).

²⁴ Peirce and Martin, 'Introduction,' 8.

order to distract citizens from the political turmoil that the country was in.²⁵ But as Eunha Oh has argued, some films from this period can still be considered to be incredibly useful tools for understanding the changes occurring in society and the Korean family at the time.²⁶ Oh contends that the popularity of monstrous-mother films reflected how the Confucian-influenced celebration of self-sacrificing mothers reveals in these works the patriarchal oppression of women that was still occurring in this period. These films would have undoubtedly provided an incredibly fruitful insight into the changing relationship towards the mother in Korean horror cinema, but unfortunately only a very small number survive today, and the majority of these are only available in print form held in the Korean Film Archives in Seoul.

In the same manner that *The Housemaid* gave birth to a fresh wave of horror films in 1960, the genre was renewed again in 1998 with Park Ki-hyung's *Yeogo gwedam* (*Whispering Corridors*, Park Ki-hyung, 1998). The first in an eventual franchise of four films, *Whispering Corridors* reinvigorated the Korean horror industry, ranking third in the box office income charts for domestically produced films in 1998.²⁷ Park's film, and the three works by other directors that followed in the series (*Yeogo gwedam II* (*Memento Mori*, Kim Tae-yong and Min Kyu-dong, 1999), *Yeogo gwedam III: Yeowoo Gyedan* (*Wishing Stairs*, Yoon Jae-yeon, 2003) and *Yeogo gwedam IV: Moksori* (*Voice*, Choe Ik-hwan, 2005)) directly appealed to the Korean youth market, with their culturally specific setting of the strict Korean school system. Closely following the success of the *Whispering Corridors* series – as well as the rising popularity of Asian horror both at home and abroad – the early years of the 2000s saw

²⁵ Kim Mee-hyun, 'The 3S Policy and Erotic Films,' in *Korean Cinema: From Origins to Renaissance*, ed. by Kim Mee-hyun (Seoul: CommBooks, 2007) 277-279.

²⁶ Eunha Oh, 'Mother's Grudge and Woman's Wail: The Monster-Mother and Korean Horror Film,' *Korean Horror Cinema*, 60-70.

²⁷ Jinhee Choi, 'A Cinema of Girlhood: *Sonyeo* Sensibility and the Decorative Impulse in Korean Horror Cinema,' in *Horror to the Extreme: Changing Boundaries in Asian Cinema* eds. Jinhee Choi and Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 39.

a growth in the popularity of ‘family horror’ films too, which featured an outside force disrupting the sanctity of the domestic unit. Films such as *Akasia* (*Acacia*, Park Ki-hyung, 2003) and *4-in yong siktak* (*Uninvited*, Lee Soo-yeon, 2003) depict narratives of adoption, whilst *A Tale of Two Sisters* has a backstory of marital infidelity and mental illness. More so than with the school ground setting of Park’s work and those that followed it, these ‘family horror’ films interrogated the changing status of the Korean family unit.

I propose that these later family horror films reinterpret the themes of the first cycle instigated by *The Housemaid* through their specific focus on the maternal and the breaking of the bond between mother and child. In many of these works a split is created between mythical self-sacrificing mothers, willing to do anything for their children, and women who are denied the chance to mother due to the loss of a child, causing them to spiral into monstrosity. However, the actions of these female antagonists are partially mitigated through the celebration of maternity that is encouraged in Korean culture. An analysis of these films can enable a psychoanalytic interrogation of the position of the mother-child dyad in Korean culture, and what effect this extreme binary of the mythical maternal and the monstrous non-mother has on the womb phantasy.

***Mo-Jeong*, Motherhood and Socially Sanctioned Monstrosity**

In a post titled ‘How to be a Korean Mother-to-be’ blogger Suzy Chung writes: “It’s never too early to start your child’s education. Never mind the child is at the fetus stage. Brain cells are developing and you have to do everything to aid your child to be

the best, don't you?"²⁸ Chung is referring to the custom of *taegyo*, a set of practices and beliefs that are encouraged in Korea (as well as in China and Japan) to enhance prenatally the mental ability and psychological well-being of the child. This can include talking to the baby, going to prenatal educational musical concerts, looking at fine art, meditation, and even the encouragement of positive thoughts and an avoidance of negativity or stress. As Riwha Hong explains, in Korea the mother-child relationship starts with *taegyo*, and the belief that a mother's experiences during her pregnancy will have a direct psychological effect on the baby that she is carrying.²⁹

In Korea life is traditionally viewed as starting from conception, and when an infant is born they are already one year old.³⁰ These same beliefs are reflected in the country's legal system. The Constitutional Court of Korea considers fetuses to be a "life in construction" and therefore they are given a right to life and abortion is illegal.³¹ This idea of a life in construction has ramifications not just for the ethical issues surrounding family planning, but also for the belief that a foetus's experience in the womb shapes the person that they are to become once born. With this emphasis on the importance of time spent in the womb for both child and mother in mind, this section will study the representation of *mo-jeong* in Korean horror cinema: the bond between women and their children, whether living or in-utero. It will explore the representation of motherhood and non-mothers (those who have lost their children

²⁸ Suzy Chung, 'How to be a Korean Mother-to-be,' The Korea Blog, July 3, 2012, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://blog.korea.net/?p=11169>

²⁹ Riwha Hong, *Shame in the Korean Uri Culture: An Interpretation of Self Psychology and Korean Indigenous Psychology* (PhD Thesis, Drew University, 2008).

³⁰ In contemporary Korea both the traditional method of calculating age and the Westernised style are now used.

³¹ Woong Kyu Sung, 'Abortion in South Korea: The Law and the Reality,' *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 26, no. 3 (2012): 285. Even though the act of abortion is illegal it is widespread across the country, and Korea actually has one of the highest abortion rates in the world. At the same time, the procedure is still subjected to harsh social stigma and the current population crisis that the country is facing has resulted in an intense political and social crackdown on clinics offering the service.

through abortion or infanticide) in three Korean horror films, arguing that these works display an extreme version of the mythical maternal.

Cho Hae-joang argues that the legacy of Confucian patriarchal thought in Korea has resulted in a highly conservative culture.³² She contends that in Koreanised Confucianism *hyao* (filial piety) was seen as the most important social value. “Filial piety extended to both sexes nondiscriminatingly”, she writes, “[a]s mothers were highly regarded and rewarded, a woman’s life goal, naturally, was to produce successful sons”.³³ Cho contends that there are two sides to the maternal in Confucian patriarchy; women are heavily oppressed and seen as subservient to the men that surround them, whilst at the same time motherhood is idealised. She proposes that maternal power is allowed and the celebration of the mother encouraged as it poses no real threat to patriarchy, since ultimately this power is based on the well-being of the son. Likewise, Kong Mee-hae argues that although this mother-power allows a woman to occupy a position independent of her husband, this is still “limited within the symbiotic nature of mother-son relationships”.³⁴ Kong argues that real social change cannot occur in Korea until this mother-power is deconstructed and then rebuilt free from the Confucian constraints that oppress women.

I propose that this mother-power operates in a similar manner to the split seen in Freudian psychoanalysis and Western patriarchal culture of the mythical maternal and the biological mother. The idealised mythical mother bestowed with this mother-power is presented as the goal for all women to strive for. This is represented not only in the womb and maternal symbolism contained in the films, but also directly in the

³² Cho Hae-joang, ‘Male Dominance and Mother Power: The Two Sides of Confucian Patriarchy in Korea,’ *Confucianism and the Family: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* ed. Walter H. Slote and George DeVos (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 193.

³³ *Ibid.*, 193.

³⁴ Kong Mee-Hae, ‘Economic Development and Women’s Status in Korea,’ *Contemporary South Korean Society: A Critical Perspective* ed. Cho Hee-yeon and Lawrence Surendra (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 46.

characters themselves and is therefore more explicit than in the American and French horror films studied in the previous two chapters of this thesis. Where Korean horror diverges from this split is in the abject biological mother. In the films I discuss here, this side of the maternal is actually represented by women who are *not* mothers. These non-mothers have been denied the chance to mother through abortion or infanticide, the death of their unborn child signalling their abject status. Due to the idealisation of the mother, the descent into monstrosity that follows the loss of a child is partially mitigated. In contrast to the fear of the female reproductive organs (and the evil which is represented as being inherent within them in films such as *Carrie*), it is the potential for the embodiment of the mythical motherhood that is focused on when these women carry out monstrous acts, whether alive or as ghosts. Therefore there is a blurring of the boundaries between these two faces of motherhood, as on many occasions the mythical mother will have to behave badly in order to protect her children, whilst the abject mother always retains the trace of the mythical mother she could have become. This further strengthens the idea that if a mother is protecting her child, or avenging an ill deed against them, her behaviour is partially forgiven.

However, although these films empower women as mothers on the surface, as Cho argues about mother-power in society, they actually reproduce a situation where a mother's power only exists in the confines of the mother-child relationship. Through the sanctioning of a non-mother's monstrosity they reinforce that motherhood is the ultimate, if not only accepted goal for women, and that if it is denied a woman will go mad with grief or even return from the dead. Chris Berry and Kim So-young have noted that throughout Korean horror cinema, ghosts are nearly always female.³⁵ The majority of these *wonhon* (avenging spirits), and the reasons behind their haunting,

³⁵ Kim So-young and Chris Berry, "'Suri Suri Masuri': The Magic of the Korean Horror Film: A Conversation," *Postcolonial Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000): 55.

are tied to the maternal. For example, they may be women who were forced to abort their children, or commit suicide because they either were – or were wrongly believed to be – pregnant; or they were a child that was in some way separated from their mother. For many scholars of Korean culture, the emotional experience of *han* – a sense of grief felt due to unfair persecution or suffering – is key to the return of these women.³⁶ In her study of women in *The Housemaid* and three other films from this period, Hyangjin Lee argues that the *wonhon* “is a definitive motif of Korean horror and initiates generic conventions quite different from its Asian or Western film counterparts”.³⁷ These spirits are not demons, but human ghosts, usually women, “for whom family conflict and sexual violation are the common causes of an early death”.³⁸ Unable to rest due to the *han* experienced at the nature of their death, the spirits of these women seek revenge for the crimes committed against them. Another common theme is the *cheonyeo gwisin* (virgin ghost), who was denied the chance to have children of her own and therefore become a proper woman. Laurel Kendall argues that in traditional Korean culture there is a clear divide between ancestors, who died well and had children to carry out their rituals after death, and ghosts, who died badly and did not have children to carry out such rites.³⁹

Han is a complex emotion that is experienced both individually and collectively, and as Min Sung Kil argues, is widely regarded to be a uniquely Korean mental state, brought about by the specific history of the country.⁴⁰ It is based in the anguish felt at

³⁶ The word *haan* is written in the English alphabet as either *haan* or *han*. However there is a clear divide between psychoanalytic and psychiatric texts which favour the spelling *haan*, and those which discuss society and the arts which use the spelling *han*. This thesis will use the common *han* unless a source is being quoted.

³⁷ Hyangjin Lee, ‘Family, Death and the *Wonhon* in Four Films of the 1960s,’ in *Korean Horror Cinema*, 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁹ Laurel Kendall, ‘Wives, Lesser Wives, and Ghosts: Supernatural Conflict in a Korean Village,’ *Asian Folklore Studies* 43 (1984): 217.

⁴⁰ Min Sung Kil, ‘Clinical Correlates of Hwa-Byung and a Proposal for a New Anger Disorder,’ *Psychiatry Investigation* 5 (2008): 125-141.

unfair treatment; combining grief, sadness, regret and depression, along with feelings of hatred and resentment. This anger is then suppressed, giving rise to *han*. As Michael Robinson explains: “the Korean word *han* carries a broad sense of a deeply seeded Korean experience of oppression and unrequited resentment borne of generations of struggle”.⁴¹ The root of *han* is therefore the collective trauma of the nation, which has suffered under the hands of others (both domestically and internationally) throughout its history, but it can be experienced individually, for example with infidelity in a marriage.

However, *han* can be seen to have a positive effect as well. Roy Richard Grinker argues that *han* is both the suffering experienced, and the way that that suffering is expressed, which is often through artistic endeavours:

Han is a culturally distinctive manner of conceptualising and experiencing misfortune, but it is also a method for thinking about the relationship between historical experience and the future. It provides sufferers a means of converting their tragedy into a dynamic and active process – whether externally through revenge, or internally by self-reflection and the development of a new identity or art.⁴²

Han can give a person the drive to keep on living due to the belief that things may be better in the future, but it can also be argued that it is *han* that drives spirits to return after death in works of fiction, to try to right the wrongs that were done to them during life. Darcy Paquet claims that many Korean people see *han* as the “distinguishing characteristic of Korean culture”, and that this is represented clearly in the on-going popularity of the melodrama genre in Korea.⁴³ *Han* is regularly used in discussions of Korean melodrama within film studies, but it also can be used in the

⁴¹ Michael Robinson, ‘Contemporary Cultural Production in South Korea: Vanishing Meta-Narratives of Nation,’ in *New Korean Cinema* ed. by Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 27.

⁴² Roy Richard Grinker, *Korea and Its Futures: Unification and the Unfinished War* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1998), 80.

⁴³ Darcy Paquet, ‘Christmas in August and Korean Melodrama,’ in *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema* ed. by Frances Gateward (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 44.

analysis of horror subgenres such as the *kuei-dam* (avenging ghost) film.⁴⁴ The female ghosts in these films return from the grave due to a feeling of *han* that is so strong that it persists after death, refusing to let the spirit rest until the culprit responsible for causing the wrongdoing is held accountable.

Andrew Hock Soon Ng contends that although *han* is seen to permeate every part of Korean life, through the influence of Confucian philosophy on the country's women can be seen to have a special relationship to it. He argues that in Korea women are historically more oppressed and disadvantaged than men, and therefore they "epitomize *han* in their very subjectivity".⁴⁵ This entails that a clear link can be drawn in Korean culture between women, *han* and the spirit world. The writing of Park Kyong-ni also supports this tie as she argues that as *han* is about hope for the future, it suggests a life after death. She contends: "This is how *han* becomes more profound and touches upon shamanism. Shamanism is based on life and extends to the infinite universe".⁴⁶ Park explains that many Korean people believe that the dead are never truly gone, but instead are living somewhere else in the universe. She argues therefore that *han* is a hope for the future, where the contradictions of love and hate, and life and death, are resolved.

In order to fully understand why this relationship between the maternal, *han* and the supernatural appears in Korean culture it is necessary to look back to one of the most important films in the country's history, *The Housemaid*, a work that does not actually contain the supernatural at all. It is a *kuei-dam* film without a *wonhon*, but the film's

⁴⁴ For an example of the use of *han* to explore Korean melodrama see Hye Seung Chung, 'Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia: A Transnational Détournement of Hollywood Melodrama,' in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre and National Cinema* ed. by Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 117-150.

⁴⁵ Andrew Hock Soon Ng, 'Women as Cultural Wound: Horror Cinema and the Imperative of *Han*,' in *The Ghostly and the Ghosted in Literature and Film: Spectral Identities* ed. by Lisa Kröger and Melanie R. Anderson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), 120.

⁴⁶ Quoted in: Ng, 'Women as Cultural Wound,' 130. In Korea shamans are usually female, which supports previous arguments in this thesis (albeit in different contexts) that women are often seen as having access to the spirit world.

antagonist housemaid Myong-ja does go through a transformation into a monstrosity akin to a ghost returning from the dead. The level at which this transformation is due to the actions of her employer (and father of the unborn child that she aborts) Dong-sik has been the subject of some debate. Hyangjin Lee argues that he is a sexually sadistic predator, and therefore suggests that Myong-ja is an innocent victim. Lee argues that Dong-sik relieves his frustration over his challenged masculinity (his wife contributing the larger income to the family) through “sexual violence directed at the housemaid”.⁴⁷ Lee believes that it is this act, combined with the wife’s encouragement to abort the baby, which transforms Myong-ja into a monster. However, it is Myong-ja who instigates their sexual encounter by undressing in front of Dong-sik. Kim Kyung Hyun on the other hand, argues that Dong-sik is instead the embodiment of the crisis that Korean masculinity was undergoing during this period of rapid modernisation.⁴⁸ He contends that Dong-sik represents an attempt at patriarchal stability in the irrationality of the women that surround him. Yet it is a form of stability that is bound to fail due to the overarching feminine hysteria and physical dysfunction that affect his life.

In the penultimate scene of *The Housemaid* after Dong-sik has drunk poison and died in his wife’s arms, she looks up and exclaims “If only I hadn’t wanted the new home!”. This declaration can be traced back throughout the film to lay the responsibility of all the death and destruction at the feet of a woman who craves modernity. It is the wife who pushes for the new Western style house, who works so much that she is unable to undertake her wifely duties so that a maid is needed, and it is the wife who encourages the maid to abort her child, causing Myong-ja to spiral into monstrosity. Even though she desires a modern lifestyle, Dong-sik’s wife is the

⁴⁷ Hyangjin Lee, ‘Family, Death and the *Wonhon*,’ 25.

⁴⁸ Kim Kyung Hyun, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 233-258.

traditional Korean mother who is willing to sacrifice everything for the good of her family. She is able to forgive her husband for his ill deeds and it is she who takes action and encourages Myong-ja to abort her baby. Yet her character is one of contradictions. Even though she suggests that her maid get rid of her child, out of the lead characters in the film she is the least manipulative and most straightforward in her demands. Although her own paid work takes her away from her wifely and motherly duties, she believes that this is for the good of the family so is willing to make that sacrifice. Unlike the other female characters in the film she wears traditional clothing, and she is lost in the modern kitchen of her new house. This is in contrast with Myong-ja who is instantly at home in her contemporary surroundings. Therefore the wife can be seen to represent Korean tradition, forced to make way for the temptations of contemporary Westernised modernisation (represented by the maid and her use of Western rat poison). As the wife's final lament suggests, if she had remained in her traditional role and not desired modernity, her family would have stayed intact.

The setting of the family home, and in particular its stairway, is key to this suggested threat of Western modernisation. The family's new house is of Western style, with two floors unlike a traditional single-storey Korean dwelling. The stairway stands as a symbol of the threat of these encroaching changes, and is the location of the death of two children: Dong-sik's son who is pushed down the stairs by Myong-ja, and their unborn child. The stairs are also symbolically tied to death through three other scenes: when Dong-sik threatens to kill one of his students by pushing her down the stairs after she attempts to blackmail him for rebuffing her romantic advances, when he tries to strangle Myong-ja outside of her bedroom, and then finally when he makes his death-crawl to be with his wife after drinking the poison. In *The*

Interpretation of Dreams, Freud argues that staircases act as a symbol of sexual intercourse, due to the physical action of ascending or descending the steps, and the stairway does appear to be linked to sex on both narrative and symbolic levels.⁴⁹ These three scenes of *The Housemaid* come about due to sexual desires, and the two deaths that occur on the steps are both of children, products of the sexual lives of the film's adult protagonists.

However, it could be proposed that the stairway in *The Housemaid* is symbolic not of sexual intercourse, but of procreation itself, and therefore of the maternal. Stairs allow for a transition between spaces, and as the site of murder in this film, stand as an analogy for the transition between life and death that is tied to motherhood through birth and intrauterine existence. The staircase in *The Housemaid* is an abject space as it marks the border between good and bad through the choices that the main characters make on its steps. It is a site of excess, death and the physical weaknesses of the body (through miscarriage and poisoning). It also acts as a divide between the different storeys of the house and their social implications. The two rooms that are located upstairs are the locations of sinful acts: the music room where Dong-sik teaches the students who are infatuated with him (and who he threatens with death on one occasion) and the bedroom of Myong-ja, which is the site of their adulterous affair. Conversely, the marital couple's bedroom and the wife's workspace are located downstairs. Therefore the Western second storey is the site of murder, desire and adultery, whilst downstairs the mother toils away for hours over her sewing machine to care for her family. Although Dong-sik drinks the poison upstairs with Myong-ja, his final moments are spent crawling back to the warm embrace of his wife downstairs in the traditional heart of their family home.

⁴⁹ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 355.



Figures 4.1 and 4.2: The staircase separates the traditional domain of the mother downstairs, and the temptation of Myong-ja and modernity upstairs

A scene that illustrates this divide further is the moment when Myong-ja throws herself down the stairs to abort her child. Wearing black, she is shot from below looking down at Dong-sik and his wife, who are visually aligned through her white dress and his white shirt. The sequence first shows the couple in conversation about their predicament before they turn to look up at the maid. Following their line of sight, the camera shakily tracks forward to an extreme low-angle shot of Myong-ja, staring down, before cutting back to a level medium close-up of the couple, and then slowly and steadily tracking backwards with them as they move away from the staircase. This difference between the jerky and fast track to a low angle, and then the steady, slow, backwards track, clearly mark Myong-ja as a threatening presence, looming over the couple as they decide their fate.

Kim Ki-Young was an avid reader of Freud, a fascination that came about during the filming of *The Housemaid*, opening the film up to Freudian readings.⁵⁰ In his book *The Remasculinization of the Korean Cinema*, Kim K. H. draws on An Jin-soo's analysis of the film, arguing that Dong-sik's death crawl symbolises a desire to return to his mother's womb. An proposes that Dong-sik's death "signifies the symbolic reunion with the mother/wife and a regression to an infantile stage. The distant and

⁵⁰ 'The Housemaid (Hanyeo)', Korean Film Archive, accessed September 1, 2015, http://www.koreafilm.org/feature/100_20.asp.

brief sound of a baby's cry after his death affirms this point".⁵¹ Kim K. H. contends that death in the film acts as a motif that symbolises the anxieties felt by a man trying to gain control over his life and his domain. I propose that this argument could be extended to suggest that this struggle for control is also an attempt by Dong-sik to control the female body and its reproductive abilities, due to his impregnation of Myong-ja. The conclusion of the film therefore stands for his acceptance that such a quest is impossible, and he returns to the safety of the wife/mother's embrace, willing to give in to her maternal power rather than attempt to control it.

In the light of Kim's fascination with Freud, it could be proposed that the characters of Myong-ja and Dong-sik's wife stand for the abject non-mother and the mythical loving mother. The wife is the safe and supportive mythical mother, whose body Dong-sik returns to at death. Her maternity has been confirmed as she has actually been able to produce children. She is sexually loyal and loving: strong enough to help financially support her family but also meek at times and in need of male support. Myong-ja's maternity on the other hand, has been cut short, rendering her body a site of death and violence. The staircase forms the border between these two representations of femininity, and once Dong-sik has made the wrong choice, he is forced to continually return to its steps to re-live the torment of his affair. Sex and violence in *The Housemaid* can therefore be seen as interchangeable due to their connection with the location of the staircase. Although the carnal act between Myong-ja and Dong-sik is only represented symbolically when it first takes place, by the end of the film the desiring gaze of the audience to see such an event is satisfied when Dong-sik attempts to strangle Myong-ja at the top of the stairs outside her bedroom

⁵¹ An Jinsoo quoted in Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*, 246.

door. Their strained faces and close embrace resemble the body at the point of climax – the *petite mort* of the orgasm.

The Housemaid is not the only film in this period where the main location of narrative action is a stairway. The aptly titled *The Devil's Stairway* is a slightly different twist on the *kuei-dam* motif as the film's audience is led to believe that a *wonhon* is haunting the lead male Gwang-ho, only for a final twist in the plot to reveal that the ghost is actually a trick played on the womanising protagonist in revenge for his actions by his ex-lover Jin-sook. Like Myong-ja, Jin-sook has also lost her unborn child after falling down a stairway, this time during an argument with Gwang-ho. Two further incidents happen on these same stairs: when Gwang-ho pushes his new wife down its steps, and then again at the film's climax the protagonist himself stumbles and falls.

In order to try and hide his sordid affair, Gwang-ho attempted to kill Jin-sook by drugging her and dumping her body in a pond. Hyangjin Lee argues that this transforms the pond into a maternal space:

[W]hen the rejected mother floats in the pond, it becomes a moment of abjection, of the abandoned child in her womb. The pond becomes a metaphorical space of birth and resistance, implying the circle of life and death, and the relationship between mother and child. Through the ritual of a figurative return to the mother's womb, Jin-sook acquires a new, pre-natal life in order to punish the social evil, Gwang-ho, who has become the personification of unrestrained and amoral Western capitalism.⁵²

Through her entry into this pond Jin-sook is reborn. Although she does not actually die, she takes matters into her own hands and is able to gain vengeance for the loss of her child and the attempt on her life. Even though Jin-sook is at first represented as a *wonhon*, and as such is the film's antagonist, she is actually a heroine who dishes out punishment on the unlikeable and untrustworthy figure of Gwang-ho.

⁵² Lee, 'Family, Death and the *Wonhon*,' 27.

Although *The Housemaid* and *The Devil's Stairway* are *kuei-dam* films without a *wonhon* in the classic sense of the subgenre, the deaths of Myong-ja and Jin-sook's unborn babies haunts those responsible for their demise. These women are two female characters driven by *han* to exact revenge against their male lovers. They also highlight another common motif of the Korean *keui-dam*: they are not seen as innately evil, and as such are represented to varying extents to be sympathetic characters (Jin-sook far more so than Myong-ja). In his book *Think No Evil: Korean Values in the Age of Globalisation*, C. Fred Alford argues that Korea has built a culture where evil does not exist. He contends that the close knitted group structure of Korean society means that Koreans seek to find and create relationships between people instead of looking for the dualisms that are necessary for conceptions such as evil. The dualism of good vs. bad that evil depends on necessitates a form of separation that counters the 'we-ness' of Korean culture and therefore cannot be comprehended. Alford writes: "the result is that Koreans do not believe in evil. Or if they do, they believe in it contingently", suggesting that in Korea there are only ideas of something being 'very bad'.⁵³ The *wonhon* in Korean horror films are never innately evil; they may harm or kill people, but they have a reason to do so and their victims are usually guilty of some misdeed, and are often partly responsible for the ghost's death.

In Lee's analysis of the *wonhon* in *The Housemaid* and *The Devil's Stairway*, she reiterates how in Korea the motif of reproduction is key to the horror genre and the position of women within the family home.⁵⁴ However, I propose that it is not the actual process of reproduction, nor the behaviours of the mother that are seen as

⁵³ C. Fred Alford, *Think No Evil: Korean Values in the Age of Globalization* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 2.

⁵⁴ Lee also argues that this is where Korean avenging spirit films differ from their Japanese counterparts as the latter are to do with repressed sexual desires rather than reproduction and the maternal, which as the next chapter of this thesis will show shown, is no longer the case. Lee, 'Family Death and the *Wonhon*,' 24.

monstrous, which emphasises the need to tread carefully when using Western horror theories such as the work of Barbara Creed in the analysis of these films. Instead the monstrosity comes from the anger that is created due to the strength of a woman's love for her unborn child. When this love is challenged or the bond broken through the death of the child, only then is the monstrosity born, and ultimately this creates sympathy, rather than abhorrence, for these characters from the films' audiences. This entails that the womb retains a far greater mythical status, away from the abject monstrosity of American and French horror. The antagonists in these films are not examples of monstrous mothers, as Myong-ja and Jin-sook have not been allowed the opportunity to 'ascend' to motherhood. Instead their actions are born out of this inability to mother, thus increasing the mythical status of motherhood as something good, and to be striven for. Motherhood is positioned as the most important goal for these women; to be denied it means that they spiral into monstrosity. The actions of the woman who cannot mother heightens the mythical status of she who can, for it is suggested that that woman too would go to any lengths to protect her children (such as the actions of Dong-sik's wife). Motherhood can be separated from the abject biological mother (represented in the monstrous women who cannot mother but want to) and therefore the maternal womb is positioned as truly mythical.

Myong-ja and Jin-sook could both be diagnosed with suffering from *hwabyung*, an anger disorder that is believed to originate from an extremely strong sense of *han*. Min Sung-kil, a psychiatrist specialising in the research and treatment of *hwabyung*, argues that it is a specifically Korean condition that is the result of *han* being suppressed to such a degree that it then explodes forth in anger. It is a syndrome that is found predominantly in women (especially mothers) and is considered to be the pathological form of *han*. Min contends that his patients are aware that their illness is

related to the suppression of anger in order to try to instil harmony in their family and social life, yet over time if the anger-inducing events are repeated the physical and psychological symptoms of *hwabyung* are felt. The patient may experience a sense of burning up, choking, or as though something needs to be pushed out of the chest or body.⁵⁵

In the discussion of *han* and *hwabyung* there is the constant use of maternal metaphors to describe the emotional state. For example, the poet Ko Un writes: “Koreans are born from the womb of *han*, grew up in the bosom of *han*, and live out *han*, die leaving *han* behind”.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the very symptoms of *hwabyung* appear to mimic gestation and birth, with the feeling that the sufferer has something growing inside of them that needs to be expelled. The link between the maternal, *han* and *hwabyung* is represented in *The Housemaid* and *The Devil’s Stairway*. Myong-ja and Jin-sook have not only been impregnated with a child out of wedlock, but they have also failed in what is seen traditionally in Korea as the most important role of women, to give birth to and protect children. Their *han* at being betrayed by their sexual partner is transformed in *hwabyung* at the deaths of their unborn children. They have no other option but to descend into monstrosity, and on a certain level, it is also a monstrosity that is socially sanctioned, if not expected.

The link between *han*, the supernatural and the maternal are present not just in traditional Korean horror films, but also in the more recent cycle of works that were instigated by the success of *Whispering Corridors* and *Ringu* (*Ring*, Nakata Hideo, 1998). Unlike the films directly in the *Whispering Corridors* series, which Jinhee Choi asserts are more to do with friendship rather than kinship, the work of Ahn Byung-ki can be seen as a direct descendent of these early maternally-orientated

⁵⁵ Min Sung-kil, ‘Treatment and Prognosis of *Hwa-Byung*,’ *Psychiatry Investigation* 1, no. 1 (2004): 31.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Alford, *Think No Evil*, 79.

films.⁵⁷ It is often the case in Korea that directors will cut their directorial teeth making a horror film, before moving on to other more respected genres or an auteurist approach to film-making. Ahn is an exception to this rule as he has directed six *kuei-dam* (avenging ghost) films, including a Chinese remake and then sequel of one of his earlier works.

As Ian Conrich has noted, Ahn is well-known for incorporating motifs from other popular horror films into his work.⁵⁸ The most notable example of this is his film *Phone*, which follows a very similar plot and narrative structure to the Japanese hit film *Ring*, and copies other popular visual motifs such as the breaking of finger nails as they are dragged down walls, and the location of the lift as a site of interaction with the spirit world. Even with this obvious referencing of its Japanese predecessor, *Phone* was one of the most successful domestic releases in the Korean box office in 2002, and has been well received internationally through the Tartan Asia Extreme distribution network.⁵⁹ Daniel Martin argues that Ahn consciously utilises horror's ability to be conveyed universally, and highlights how the director sees his own works as Asian, rather than specifically Korean.⁶⁰ Martin argues that Ahn's films "reflect and subvert" the traditional conventions of Korean horror cinema, "presenting texts that are both recognisably local, yet designed to be easily exportable as part of a homogeneous cycle of Asian horror."⁶¹ The influence of American modern horror films such as *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* on Ahn's work is persistently clear, yet the director himself has admitted that he

⁵⁷ Jinhee Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press: 2010), 129.

⁵⁸ Ian Conrich, 'Gothic Bodies and the Return of the Repressed: The Korean Horror Films of Ahn Byeong-ki,' *Gothic Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 106-115.

⁵⁹ Peirse and Martin, 'Introduction,' 9.

⁶⁰ Daniel Martin, 'Between the Local and the Global: 'Asian Horror' in Ahn Byung-ki's *Phone* and *Bunshinsaba*,' *Korean Horror Cinema*, 145

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

purposefully includes narratives that are more supernatural in tone as they appeal to an Asian audience.⁶²

Like Myong-ja and Jin-sook, in *Phone* Jin-hee was pregnant with the child of a man whom she could not have. The life of her baby (and her own life) were also taken away from her when she was pushed down a staircase by the man's wife. What has driven all these women to their various forms of monstrosity – whether supernatural or not – is a betrayal. First, they are betrayed by a rejection from someone that they love, emotionally depicted in *Phone* when the young Jin-hee is used and then pushed aside by the thoughtless Chang-hoon. Then, their ability to mother is taken away by a secondary betrayal, either by their lover or their lover's wife. The increased use of flash-backs in Korean horror to depict the reasons for the ghost's haunting stresses the importance of this betrayal. The heavy focus on the reason for the *wonhon*/living avenger's need for retribution is key. It gives justification to the revenge of these women, showing why their *han* has turned into monstrosity, and as such, to some extent sanctions it.

Christopher K. Chung and Samson J. Cho argue that key to understanding *han* and *hwabyung* is knowledge of the importance of *jeong* to the Korean sensibility.⁶³ *Jeong* is the emotional and psychological bond between Koreans. When *jeong* is broken or violated, then *han* arises, and then in extreme cases this *han* can transform into *hwabyung*. Therefore Chung and Cho argue that *han* cannot exist without *jeong*. They contend that the arguments that are used to support the uniqueness of *han* and *hwabyung* to Korea, such as the suppression of anger, the difficulties women are faced with in a patriarchal culture and national hardship due to war and occupation,

⁶² Kim Kyu-han, 'Interview with Bunshinsaba Director Ahn Byung-ki: "Horror is Part of my Everyday Life",' *Max Movie* (August 2004) quoted in Martin, 'Between the Local,' 147.

⁶³ Christopher K. Chung and Samson J. Cho, 'Conceptualization of *Jeong* and Dynamics of *Hwabyung*,' *Psychiatry Investigation* 3, no. 1 (2006): 46-54.

cannot actually be considered as culture-specific as they can be seen in different variations across the world. Therefore they question why it is only in Korea that *han* can evolve into *hwabyung*, and declare that they believe the answer to lie in the emotional bond of *jeong*.

Jeong does not refer to a cognitive state; rather, it is an emotion that involves two or more individuals. It differs starkly from the more Western concept of love. As Luke Kim argues:

Jeong appears to have a different affective quality than that of love... It seems that *jeong* represents a more primordial and primitive way of relating than love, almost similar to an affect of mother-infant union or 'return-to-the-womb', a symbolic world of being more fused and less separated in the separation-individuation process. It has a quality of symbiotic interdependency.⁶⁴

Therefore Kim's conception of *jeong* clearly positions it as a form of womb phantasy, suggesting that it leads to a culture where mother and child remain more tightly bound throughout life. Chung and Cho's work supports this argument when they write that the first experience of *jeong* is when an infant is held and carried by their mother:

As the mother's warmth permeates to and is felt by the infant, so does the *jeong* flow to its heart. This type of *jeong*, called *mo-jeong*, is considered the prototype. The mother also reads the baby's desires and needs. This bi-directional sharing is the experience of *jeong* which ultimately leads to feelings of security and comfort.⁶⁵

This analysis of the Korean experience would suggest therefore that although *jeong* is considered to be an extra-psychic emotion, it must to be tied to the formation and workings of the ego, as it is formed in the earliest stages of life.

Further to this, unlike the Western idea of love, which has as its primary example the relationship between two non-biologically related people, the bond in *jeong* is not romantic or sexual and is more like the symbiotic relationship that occurs between

⁶⁴ Luke Kim, *Beyond the Battle Line: The Korean War and my Life* (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris, 2012), 231.

⁶⁵ Chung and Cho, 'Conceptualization of *Jeong*,' 48.

mother and child in the pre-Oedipal period. The table below clearly distinguishes the key differences between *jeong* and love.

<i>Jeong</i>	Love
Inter-Individual	Intra-Individual
Centrifugal	Centripetal
Gender-neutral	Gender-orientated
Temporal factor: slow	Temporal factor: instant to slow
Pre-Oedipal	Oedipal
Passive	Active
Opposite emotion: <i>haan</i>	Opposite emotion: hate

Figure 4.3: Comparison of *jeong* and love⁶⁶

The differences shown in this table reinforce the idea that the primary experience of *jeong* is that with the mother during the pre-Oedipal period. Simultaneously, this table – and Chung and Cho’s research as a whole – is representative of how psychoanalysis has influenced psychiatry through the use of the term ‘pre-Oedipal’ to discuss this period of symbiosis with the mother. That *han* is the opposite emotion of *jeong* rather than hate is revealing as *han* is formed through the repression of anger at the breaking of *jeong*, again linking this emotion to a more psychoanalytic understanding of the mind. The argument that *jeong* is gender-neutral is also critical. If the initial period after birth can be seen as an extension of the womb, and womb phantasies actually represent a desire to return to this period of the symbiotic mother-child relationship, rather than the actual biological womb, then this research that suggests that *jeong* – which originates in this period – is gender neutral, and reinforces the argument that

⁶⁶ Chung and Cho, ‘Conceptualization of *Jeong*,’ 47.

womb phantasies are also gender neutral. Therefore, womb phantasies can be seen to stand apart from the heteronormative assumptions of much of psychoanalysis, since whatever the gender or sexuality of the subject, the initial love for the mother is the same.

Chung and Cho argue that as *jeong* exists in the different types of relationships that Korean people have with each other, such as friendship, family or work bonds, a sense of ‘we-ness’ develops called *woori*. This is in opposition to the Western ‘I’ orientated culture. Chung and Cho argue: “the strongest, most essential bond among Koreans is this we-ness mediated by the emotional glue of *jeong*.”⁶⁷ Therefore *woori* is the social circle of a person that is bound together through *jeong*. Chung and Cho argue that the Korean *woori*-orientated society is about interpersonal relationships, loyalty and non-verbal communication, whereas other I-orientated societies feature autonomy, privacy, individual freedom and communication at face value. Chung and Cho contend that dependence is at the heart of a *woori*-orientated society, and a need to belong. Subsequently, “unquestioning loyalty is a major rubric of Korean society”, and it is the violation of the loyalty that gives rise to *han* in such an intense form as is found in the country:

If there were no trust, loyalty, or commitment, there would be no betrayal. Betrayal that becomes the intense psychological trauma of *haan*, and eventually *hwabyung*, occurs where unquestionable loyalty and trust is expected and mandated. Therefore, only where *jeong* has been strengthened and cultivated... does *haan* result as a reaction to its violation; *jeong* is a basic Korean culture-specific emotion and a prerequisite to *haan*.⁶⁸

The stronger the bond of *jeong* in a relationship, the more bitter the experience of *han* when betrayal is experienced. Chung and Cho contend that the reason *han* and

⁶⁷ Chung and Cho, ‘Conceptualization of *Jeong*,’ 49.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 50.

hwabyung are felt so strongly in Korea, and indeed even identified with the collective psyche of the nation, is because of the importance of *jeong* in the lives of its people.

This understanding of the relationship between *jeong*, *han* and *hwabyung* allows for a greater insight into the narrative structure and character traits of the films discussed in this chapter. That the avenging female is not depicted as the most malevolent character in the narrative, with this role often going to a philandering male, gives a level of justification to her actions. Often the women in these narratives start off as reasonably sympathetic characters, with their actions only turning to monstrosity once the bond of *jeong* with a loved one has been broken. In *The Housemaid*, *The Devil's Stairway* and *Phone* this loved one is an older, richer male, who rejects her for his wife and a socially-sanctioned union, free from the stigma of divorce and having children out of wedlock. These women, even in their monstrous state, are sympathetic characters because at the most basic level, they have still suffered from a breaking of *jeong*, a bond that is so critical to the Korean 'we-ness'-bound culture.

Even more significant and traumatic than the breaking of the *jeong* between two lovers, is the breaking of the *jeong* that exists between the mother and her child. So often in the *kuei-dam*, and in many other Korean narratives where a woman spirals into monstrosity, does the loss of a child feature, or the woman is separated from her children by her own death. *Mo-jeong* (mother-*jeong*) is the most powerful expression of the bond, and is felt by both mother and child simultaneously. Hong argues that the practice of *taegyo* is critical to the formation of *jeong*:

In traditional Korea, the mother-child relationship starts from *taegyo* (prenatal care), with various guidelines for pregnant women outlining desirable and undesirable attitudes, emotions, and behaviours during pregnancy. These guidelines are based on a belief that a mother's experience during her pregnancy will directly and significantly affect the baby inside her womb; this experience therefore heightens awareness of the unique psychological and biological bonds between the mother and

the baby. *Taegyo* creates a strong psychological and emotional bond, *jeong*.⁶⁹

Therefore traditional Korean beliefs encourage the strongest form of *jeong* – that between a mother and her child – to start to be formed as soon as the mother realises that she is pregnant. In these films the betrayal of the partner and the loss of the bond between the men and women incites *han* through the repression of their emotions, but it is the death of their unborn children – the breaking of the crucial bond of *mo-jeong* by an interaction with a third party – and the taking away of their ability to mother fully, that ultimately inspires the ill-deeds of these women. In a culture where the bond between mother and child is seen as the starting point for the formation of not just the individual, but the very basic premise of its ‘we-ness’ orientated society, the destruction or refusal of that bond threatens the stability and order of the system.

As *mo-jeong* develops into other forms of *jeong* as the child grows older, the original bond with the mother remains as the most perfect. Hong argues: “Given the mother’s unconditional love, care, empathy, and sacrifice, the baby experiences and feels the *jeong* of the mother, which persists into later life”.⁷⁰ Subsequently, it is the *jeong* between a mother and child that may be replicated to varying extents in all other interactions. *Mo-jeong* is, therefore, a Korean womb phantasy; it is a reference to the early mother-child bond as the most complete of all human relationships. The narratives of *The Housemaid*, *The Devil’s Stairway* and *Phone* can be seen to support this exaltation of *mo-jeong* through conventions that provide a social sanction that covertly encourages, if not expects, the monstrous behaviour of the female antagonists. If the bond between mother and child is the strongest, then it requires the

⁶⁹ Hong, *Shame in the Korean Uri Culture*, 143.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

fiercest reaction when it is broken in order to support the esteemed position of that bond – the very bond the Korean culture itself is built on.

A Tale of Two Sisters

Mo-jeong – or rather the breaking of this precious bond – ties the films discussed in this chapter together. Although only a small proportion of the Korean horror output since the 1960s has been analysed, the breaking of the mother-child bond through the death of either component stands out as a prominent, if not necessary, motif of these ‘family horror’ films, and can even be seen as a common thread in other subgenres such as high school *kuei-dam* popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This section will use Kim Ji-woon’s *A Tale of Two Sisters* to demonstrate how the prominent themes and motifs in Korean horror cinema are drawn from traditional myths and folktales, in the same manner that psychoanalysis has mined such cultural products for proof of its key proposals. It will demonstrate how the symbolic representation of the womb coincides in cultural and psychoanalytic readings, moving towards the argument that the womb phantasy – the desire to return to the symbiotic period of oneness with the mother – is a human trait that is seen not only across the world, but also throughout the history of humankind. Based on the popular Korean folktale ‘The Story of Janghwa and Hongryeon’, the narrative of Kim’s film exists in the space between psychological corruption and supernatural drama, with its final act revealing not just one twist, but two, and the suggestion that this is no simple avenging ghost narrative.



Figure 4.4: The haunted cupboard in *A Tale of Two Sisters*

Su-yeon's bedroom cupboard plays a pivotal role in *A Tale of Two Sisters*. Upon realising that her husband was having an affair with the nurse Eun-ju, the girls' mother hung herself within it, and when Su-yeon found her body she pulled the piece of furniture down on top of her by mistake, and began to suffocate. The step-mother Eun-ju witnessed the crushing of Su-yeon, but refused to help her. Walking out of the bedroom she is shown stopping for a moment, about to change her mind, when Su-mi tells her to stay out of her family's business. Declaring that she will regret those words Eun-ju says nothing about Su-yeon's predicament, and the young girl dies. This event is portrayed as a flashback near the end of the film, revealing the reason for the cupboard's looming presence throughout. Through its position as a site of death and ghostly rebirth, the cupboard acts as a portal to the spiritual world, connecting a mother and her daughters even after their physical bodies have been permanently separated. However, the question of whether this portal does actually access the spiritual plane, or if it is simply a phantasy of reunification with the mother for the film's protagonist, remains unanswered. Either way, like Carrie White's praying cupboard, this piece of furniture is symbolic of the maternal womb.



Figures 4.5 and 4.6: Uncanny images: womb symbolism and doubling

A Tale of Two Sisters opens with the image of a round bowl of water that ripples as an unseen person walks into a room and then begins to wash his hands. This close-up of the bowl, filmed from above so that its circumference reaches to the boundary of the screen, cuts to a low level long-shot of a doctor, preparing himself for his next patient. The camera remains stationary as a nurse leads a patient into the room, with the doctor silently watching her slow laboured approach. In a premonition of the film's dramatic dénouement, the two characters stand for the two different plots of the film: the patient resembles a traditional *wonhon*, with her dark hair covering a face that refuses to look out from under the black tresses that surround it, representing the supernatural narrative that dominates the viewer's first experience of the film. The doctor then stands for mental illness and the complex delusion of the work's protagonist, which takes on a powerful uncanniness once the twist has been revealed. Behind these two characters are two identical windows, again reinforcing the dual layer of the plot, but it is the patient's window that the audience is guided through first, and a close-up of her face as she slowly moves her head towards the light begins the process of audience alignment that will be so greatly ruptured by the film's climax.

During the consultation the doctor holds up a photo of her family to the girl and asks "who is this" he taps on the body of the nurse/stepmother, therefore presenting a number of interpretations to his question. He could be asking who the woman is in

particular, or referring to the group of people (her family) as a whole. Or, he could be asking the young girl whether the older woman standing at the back of the family portrait is actually who she believes herself to be, again a foretelling of the patient's multiple personality disorder. On first viewing this holding up of the photograph bears little significance; it is only once Su-mi's secret has been revealed that the delicacy and complexity in Kim's directorial touch is shown. Although the film is often discussed in terms of its beautiful *mise en scène*, it is this circulation around the family, the self and the (replacement) mother that bestows it with both a culturally-specific Korean heritage, and a sense of the universal uncanny in the truest Freudian understanding of the concept.⁷¹

Although it is a bedroom cupboard that acts as the principal womb symbol in *A Tale of Two Sisters*, in the original folktale it is a pond that acts as portal to the spiritual realm and reunification with the mother.⁷² 'The Story of Janghwa and Hongryeon' dates back to the Joseon Dynasty (1392 - 1910) and has been remade for cinema five times, as well as influencing countless other works. As Robert L. Cagle argues "The tale's influence is so pervasive that it has become a cultural metaphor in the same way that fairy tales such as 'Cinderella', 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'Hansel and Gretel' have in the West."⁷³ This historic tale is incredibly insightful when considering the development and prevalence of the bond between the maternal and spiritual in Korean cultural artifacts. Not only has this story been reinterpreted many times in the narratives of horror films, but it also reveals critical examples of the relationship between femininity and death in Korean culture, and how womb symbols such as the pond, act as portals to the spiritual world. Further to this, it contains motifs that

⁷¹ For analyses of the *mise en scène* in the film see: Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance*, 160-163, and Robert L. Cagle, 'Diary of a lost girl: Victoriana, Intertextuality and *A Tale of Two Sisters*,' *Korean Horror Cinema*, 158-172.

⁷² For a synopsis of the folktale see appendix.

⁷³ Cagle, 'Diary of a Lost Girl,' 158.

reappear continually throughout Korean horror cinema: the ghosts of women, pregnancy, abortion, unjust punishment, murder, stepmothers and powerless fathers.

Many of the symbolic elements in ‘The Story of Janghwa and Hongryeon’ are carried forward into Kim’s film. The opening image of the bowl of water discussed above could be seen to refer to the importance of the pond in the original folktale, whilst this body of water is more obviously doubled in the lake next to Su-mi’s house. Further to this, although abortion is not referenced at all in the film’s narrative, a scene where Su-mi discovers a bloody package of fish in the refrigerator alludes to the skinned rat that was hidden in Rose’s bed. As Coralline Dupuy argues:

A Tale of Two Sisters features strong visual and thematic markers that point to the fairytale origins of the plot, such as an aesthetic obsession with flowers, the presence of ghosts, and the idyllic, yet isolated, lakeside location of the family home. All of these visual markers have strong symbolic values, echoing Jung’s statement that ‘in myths and fairytales, the psyche tells its own story’.⁷⁴

The narrative too links back to many of the traditional beliefs of Korean culture that are represented in the original folktale, such as the haunting of families after the death of a first wife and the replacement with another. Laurel Kendall writes that after the death of a first wife many people believed that she would return to try and take her husband’s spirit back with her. Kendall contends that in Korea the presence of ghosts, even those of close relatives, is dangerous, if not deadly, repeating the traditional proverb “the hand of the dead is a hand of nettles”.⁷⁵ Dead spirits were believed to bring with them sickness or unhealthy addiction; and more notably, as Kendall reports, “a pitying mother caresses her grief-ridden daughter and drives her mad”.⁷⁶ It is this madness that is Kim’s addition to the original tale, and it is one that enables

⁷⁴ Coralline Dupuy, “‘Why Don’t You Remember? Are You Crazy?’: Korean Gothic and Psychosis in *A Tale of Two Sisters*,” *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* 3 (Nov 2007): no pagination, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://irishgothichorrorjournal.homestead.com/taleoftwosisters.html>.

⁷⁵ Kendall, ‘Wives, Lesser Wives, and Ghosts,’ 217.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

him to create a subtext to difficult mother-child relations that reflect the wider symbolism of his work.

Repetition and reenactment are key to Kim's film. The film recreates the original source text with a narrative and formal style that focuses on doubling, from the two narratives run side by side (spectral and psychotic) to the continual motif of pairs of objects or things in the *mise en scène*: the pair of windows in the first scene are followed by a sequence that shows the two girls arriving at their father's house, followed by Su-mi looking at a pair of swings, a pair of windows, and then later their two pairs of legs as they sit by the lake. To take this reading further, on arrival Su-yeon is shown running over to a Cape Gooseberry plant and pulling off two of the papery cases. The first is empty, potentially referring to her position as just a figment of Su-mi's imagination; the second is sour, standing for her sister's illness.

The four women in the film form three sets of doubles, albeit comprised of four people who all purely exist in the mind of just one person: Su-mi and Su-yeon, Su-mi and her stepmother Eun-ju, and then Eun-ju and the dead mother. Su-mi and Su-yeon mimic each other's mannerisms, or rather Kim hints at their real embodiment as just one person through the repetition of small acts – such as the shaking loose of the hair – throughout the film. Su-mi and her stepmother Eun-ju also share this doubling of gestures, suggesting an alignment of the daughter and her father's wife that carries hints of Oedipal anxiety long before the plot twist is even revealed. The only double that does not share these echoes in behaviour is the stepmother and birth mother, and instead these two characters are united as manifestations of Su-mi's guilt that she was unable to save her sister.

This doubling is just one of the many ways that the film can be seen as an illustration of the uncanny (in the Freudian sense), whilst still remaining culturally

specific. In 'The Uncanny' Freud draws on Rank's work on the double, where it is proposed that doubling has links to the belief in the soul and also the fear of death. Freud argues that "the 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death' as Rank says; and probably the 'immortal' soul was the first 'double' of the body."⁷⁷ Freud contends that this need for a doubling of the self emerges from the primary narcissism of early youth, yet critically, when this period has been surmounted "the 'double' reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death."⁷⁸ Freud goes on to write that this new conception of the double that arises after primary narcissism sometimes makes itself apparent through the criticising of the self, the delusion of being watched, or the self-censorship of the mind, all of which can be seen in the neurosis of Su-mi and the many doubles that her mind has created.

Therefore, the womb phantasy and the psychic drive behind the double act in the same manner, as they are both separately split into a dialectic. The trace of the double as a reassurance of life after death remains in the mind through religion and spirituality – the belief in ghosts – yet at the same time this belief in the spiritual also confirms the impending nature of death. Likewise, the desire to return to the mythical womb stands for the continuation of the life after death through the recreation of the existence before life, yet it is also a return to the abject, and necessitates a loss of the 'I' due to the power of the all-encompassing symbiotic mother.

Su-mi's relationship with her biological mother embodies this dialectical relationship as she is haunted by her ghost (in her mind), whilst also wanting to return to her embrace. In the single scene where mother and daughter are shown alive

⁷⁷ Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 235.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

together they are not particularly close, but Su-mi looks over old family photographs fondly with her sister, and treasures items that belonged to her mother. Although the narrative of the text appears to be more focused on the internal dynamic between Su-mi, Su-yeon and Eun-ju, the subtext and symbolism of the film are purely maternal. For example, there are a number of concentric womb symbols in the film and are joined to further symbols of birth, procreation and gestation. First there is Su-yeon's cupboard, then the bloody bag that Eun-ju is seen dragging about and in which Su-mi believes that Su-yeon is encased. Then there is the house itself, which is constantly referred to as being alive. Su-mi speaks to her sister about Eun-ju saying "That woman is strange, and so is this house", whilst later on Eun-ju (Su-mi) says "This damn house won't leave me alone". Encasing both of the former womb symbols of the cupboard and the bag, as well as its inhabitants, the house is transformed into a living – and dying – body. Near the end of the film the real Eun-ju is shown walking across floorboards which ooze with blood on each step, and the *mise en scène* is filled with flowers and plants that slowly die as the film progresses, an addition that Kim used to suggest the original source material of the film.⁷⁹

Water is also used to symbolise the maternal, madness and death. For example, during a dinner party sequence when Eun-ju's cousin and his wife have been invited over Eun-ju (Su-mi in real life) talks about her childhood and tells two inappropriate stories at the dinner table, both that link water to death and madness. This scene also links mental illness with femininity, as the cousin's wife begins to start choking, and having some form of psychotic episode. She rolls around on the floor with her body mimicking the same spasms as Si-yeon does in her moment of death, revealed later on. It is only once they have left the house that the wife tells her husband what she

⁷⁹ Jamie Russell, liner notes in *A Tale of Two Sisters* [DVD] (London: Tartan Video, 2003).

saw: a young girl, covered in blood, under the kitchen sink. This could be interpreted in two ways, with its true meaning left up to the imagination of the viewer. First her vision could be seen as proof that the house is actually being haunted, or secondly, due to the administering of medication by her husband, she too could be suffering from a psychotic illness, bringing about a vision due to the stressful conditions of the dinner (with Su-mi pretending to be Eun-ju). This scene takes female hysteria outside of the family and makes it endemic.

The focus on water not only recalls the original fairytale, but also highlights its two symbolic functions: the link between water and the spiritual, and the suggestion of the process of gestation and birth. In the tale, Rose and Lotus become spirits of the water, and it is through committing suicide in the pond that they are able to rejoin their mother and reap vengeance on the evil stepmother. In Kim's film, rather than having the pond as the space where life and death meet, it is the womb symbol of the cupboard and the location of the bed (with sleeping being a recreation of being in the safe space of the mother's body). One of the film's spectral climaxes comes early on in a sequence where Su-mi is lying next to her sister in bed. She sees a figure begin to crawl around the end of the bed before rising up. This figure – her mother – is dressed in black, but still with the usual *wonhon* hair hanging around her white face. As she moves towards Su-mi she swings slightly from side to side as the sound of a rope creaks, an image and aural addition that only make sense again on the second viewing of the film. Her neck is snapped to one side and her movements are jerky yet at the same time obviously spectral through their weightless motion. The ghostly figure stands up on the bed over a cowering Su-mi, her legs over the young girl's chest. As the daughter looks up blood begins to run down the inside of the woman's leg, before a hand reaches out from under her dress.

This spectral birth could be seen as representing Su-mi's jealousy of her younger sister. Not only is Su-yeon the younger sister, so would have been the object of Su-mi's jealousy when they were children, but also it was Su-yeon that has been reunited with her mother in the spirit world, not Su-mi. For the hand that comes out from beneath the fold of the mother's skirt is not a child's hand, but an adult's. Through her death enclosed under the weight of the cupboard, Su-yeon has reentered the maternal womb. Therefore, this uncanny birthing scene displays Su-mi's own womb phantasy. Her nightmare reveals an unconscious phantasy that her sister has been reunited with their mother through a return to the womb via the portal of the cupboard. Su-mi's latent desire to return to that safe space is then reworked into the manifest content of the dream that shows this unification as horrific (yet still possible).

Su-yeon's bedroom cupboard is one of the greatest uncanny womb symbols in horror cinema. In the film this piece of furniture is clearly split between being a site of death and a site of reunification with the mother. As a site of death it is aligned with the abject biological body of the mother, a link that is supported through the corpses of Su-yeon and the mother herself, as well as the amniotic fluid that pours out from between the folds of the blankets within. Whereas gestation and phantasies of origin are very much in the realm of the mythical maternal, the actual process of birth resolutely belongs to the mother's abject body. Moving in the other direction, the cupboard also represents the mythical maternal womb that would allow for a reunification between Su-mi and her mother, as well as with her beloved sister who has already re-entered her mother's body via the cupboard. Her constant need to revisit the site of her family members' deaths represents Su-mi's desire to return to the embrace of her mother and sister, yet as this would equal (abject) death the desire is repressed, only to return in the ghostly spirit of her mother.

Although the cupboard haunts Su-mi throughout the majority of the film, it is also a site of imaginary retribution for her. In one of the closing scenes in the film during the climactic final revelation of the truth of Su-mi's illness, the real Eun-ju is shown entering Su-yeon's bedroom, now removed of much of its furniture apart from the cupboard, two chairs, and a number of blank picture frames. The room is cold and lit with a ghostly blue filter, with the lights flickering on and off. The cupboard door opens by itself, revealing a cord between two quilts that Eun-ju pulls. As the cupboard gives birth to the maternal specter a thick watery fluid oozes out as the dark body erupts from between the blankets, and the sound of a person screaming – a sonic mix between a woman giving birth and the sound of a child in pain – dominates the soundtrack. As Eun-ju pushes herself back against the wall under a shelf of evil-looking dolls that lean over her, the screen cuts to black. This sequence could be seen to suggest a reality in the mother's ghostly presence, yet it is followed by a close-up shot of Su-mi's face as she is lying in her hospital bed. The slight smile that appears on the edges of her mouth suggests that this scene too is just a figment of her deranged imagination. In her mind the ghost of her mother has finally gained vengeance for Eun-ju's abandonment of Su-yeon.

Su-mi's constant return to her sister's bedroom cupboard is a compulsion to repeat that the young girl cannot escape from. On one such occasion Eun-ju (Su-mi) is shown locking Su-yeon (also Su-mi) into the cupboard as a form of punishment, an act that takes on a heavy psychic weight when the truth about Su-mi's delusion is revealed. On a conscious level the young girl sees the cupboard as a place of danger, fear and punishment, yet her constant return to its doors suggests a desire for this space and the potential reunification with the mother that it can bring. However, it is important to note that this symbolical imagery is not supportive of the Freudian death

drive, as the very presence of the ghost of the mother denies the possibility of the inertia that Freud argues is achievable in the return to the “earlier state of things”.⁸⁰ Su-mi is not seeking the nothingness of the death drive, but the embrace of her mother. This wished for loving relationship is a thing of sensation and duration, not the termination of such experiences. Instead it could be proposed that any film that combines womb symbolism with a supernatural presence is instead more akin to Freud’s earlier statement that life in the womb suggested the potential for life after death; that a spirit can live on after its body has decayed. Therefore the womb is linked to death in these films through its position as the origin of life, yet this ‘death’ is not a true end, but only a stage in the soul’s journey. As such, Su-mi’s constant need to return to the cupboard – symbolically a site of birth and historically a site of death – is representative of the circular and transient nature of life and death (something that will be discussed further in the next chapter).

When Su-mi’s father confronts her about her delusion, and the plot twist is revealed, she restages Su-yeon’s death, but this time Eun-ju is directly responsible. The stepmother is shown dragging a bloody sack across the house. Even though the audience is now aware that these characters are all in Su-mi’s mind, the scene remains with the film’s original fantasy structure, with stepmother and stepdaughter played by the two different actresses and seemingly occupying different spaces. Su-mi finds the bag, and scrabbles to get inside, believing it to hold the body of her sister. As she tries to find a knife to cut the fabric she discovers that the bag has moved into a cupboard, another instance of concentric womb symbolisation. Subsequently, her need to restage the death of Su-yeon still operates within the symbolic structure of the maternal, even if she is shifting the guilt onto the figure of the evil stepmother.

⁸⁰ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 36.

This scene with the bloody sack nestled inside a cupboard reinforces the idea that this enclosed space acts as the border between life and death via its position as a symbol of the maternal womb. For Su-mi, as with Freud, a cupboard (and the womb) is both what is known and unknown – a space that can conceal but also reveal, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. It is a place of horror, but also comforting protection (Su-mi's fantasy of retribution), and it is a place of death and of life. It is from something as seemingly insignificant as a piece of furniture that the unconscious of *A Tale of Two Sisters* is revealed.

Even though a surface reading of *A Tale of Two Sisters* would present it as being a film about a sister's guilt over the death of her sibling, the subtext of the film is saturated in the maternal and a desire to rejoin the lost mother. What is critical is that in Freudian theory, Korean psychoanalysis, Korean folklore and in the country's cinema, not only are the same symbols used to express the maternal womb, but they do so directly. In the same manner that Freud argued in 1900 that bodies of water and containers such as cupboards represent the maternal womb and the act of birth, 'The Story of Janghwa and Hongryeon' directly equates the pond with the maternal. It is in its waters that Rose and Lotus rejoin their mother and are born into the spirit world. It is this alignment of maternal symbolisation across nations and indeed, across history, that strengthens the importance of the womb phantasy to human psychic life, regardless of background.

Conclusion

The films studied in this chapter all explore the bond between mother and child and the importance of the womb to the Korean psyche. The time that is spent in-utero is seen as vital in the formation of who the child is to become, and the resulting

relationship between mother and child stands as the foundation of the Korean culture of 'we-ness'. This bestows the mother with a great deal of power, but also the potential for blame if anything goes wrong. As detailed in the first section of this chapter, in traditional Confucian-influenced Korean society, motherhood was seen as the ultimate, if not only, goal for women. The devotional acts of these mythical good mothers were celebrated, whilst simultaneously women who were unable to mother go insane due to their loss. Rather than a distrust of maternity – as can be seen in American horror cinema – motherhood, or the loss of it, mitigates some of the blame for the actions of these women.

A Tale of Two Sisters provides a contrast to the films discussed in the first section of this chapter as mythical maternity is only represented implicitly through the womb symbol of the cupboard. Therefore this film is more in line with the use of womb symbolism in American and French horror as the desire to return to the symbiotic union with the mother is represented indirectly, and there is a greater divide between the abject ghost mother and the mythical power of the maternal womb. Even though Su-mi has a troubled relationship with her mother, it is still to her maternal embrace that the girl wants to return. The *mo-jeong* formed in the womb remains as an unbreakable bond. It is this persistent – if at times repressed – bond, and the desire to perpetuate the symbiotic relationship in later life, that is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Sacks, Wells, and Water Tanks: Japan

This chapter will use the work of a number of Japan's most prominent psychoanalysts to explore the maternal and the symbolic power of the womb in the latest cycle of *kaidan* (ghost) films dating from 1998 onwards. With reference to the changing position of mothers in Japanese society that occurred during this period it will first argue that two *kaidan* films by Nakata Hideo reveal the patriarchal fear of the country's shifting family values, and a desire to reinforce the maternal stereotype of the 'good wife, wise mother'. Using the psychoanalytic theory of Kitayama Osamu I argue that these films demonstrate how the patriarchal split between the abject biological mother and the mythical maternal can clearly be seen in their use of womb symbolism and the position of this symbolism in their narratives. I will also examine the American remakes of these films, to show how womb symbolism carries an international meaning. This chapter will then critically engage with four films by Miike Takashi, arguing that the director's work critiques the traditional values and ideals that are placed on men and women in Japanese society. Using Doi Takeo's theory of *amae*, I will show how, through the use of womb symbolism and maternal themes, Miike corrupts the desire to be unconditionally loved – or rather to love unconditionally as seen in the 'good wife, wise mother' – which is fundamental to the Japanese conception of motherhood.

The Focus on the Mother in Japanese Horror Cinema and Psychoanalysis

When the Lumière Brothers' Cinematograph was first exhibited in Japan in 1897 it was to an audience that was well acquainted with the uncanny visual delights of the moving image. As Aaron Gerow notes, the *gentō*, or magic lantern, had been

developed in the country into a rich narrative-based medium utilising moving pictures.¹ For the first ten years of their existence in Japan, cinematic images were classed as *misemono*, “a carnival-like spectacle of oddities and one of a myriad of sideshow entertainments that date back to the Edo era”.² Situated within this larger context of existing practices, and combined with an audience already accustomed to the grand special effects of *Kabuki* theatre, cinema seamlessly entered Japanese cultural life, with the country going on to become one of the largest producers of film in the world.³

Horror has been a key genre of Japanese cinema since its very beginning. Two of the earliest films to be shot and exhibited in Japan were the ghost stories *Bake Jizo* (*Jizo the Spook*, Asano Shirō, 1898) and *Shinin no sosei* (*Resurrection of a Corpse*, Asano Shirō, 1898) filmed by the cameraman Asano Shirō. Since those early days of Japanese cinema, *kaidan* – or ghost – films have continually formed one of the most popular subgenres of horror cinema, if not Japanese cinema as a whole. *Kaidan* stories have been a common form of narrative in Japan for centuries, reaching their peak in the Edo period (1603-1868). Historically these folkloric tales were predominantly passed on by word of mouth, with the storyteller supplementing his or her words with dramatic gestures to engage their audience through visual performances. They were frightening or uncanny ghost stories that went on to be depicted in both *Noh* and *Kabuki* theatres, as well as in literature and then later on in film. The term *kaidan* can be broken down into the characters of *kai* meaning

¹ Aaron Gerow, ‘Japanese Film and Television,’ in *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society*, eds. Victoria Lyon Bestor and Theodore C. Bestor, with Akiko Yamagata (London: Routledge, 2011), 214.

² Ibid.

³ Japan was rated as the fourth-largest producer of films between 2005 and 2010. See: ‘Australia and the World: International Comparisons,’ Screen Australia, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://web.archive.org/web/20121027152501/http://screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/acompfilms.asp>.

“strange, mysterious, rare or bewitching apparition” and *dan*, which has similar connotations to talking or reciting a narrative.⁴ *Kaidan* stories feature ghosts, usually women or other powerless people such as servants, returning from the grave to carry out acts of revenge against those who wronged them during life. Throughout the history of Japanese cinema the *kaidan* plot has remained as a constant source of inspiration, including films such as *Tôkaidô Yotsuya kaidan* (*The Ghost of Yotsuya*, Nakagawa Nubuo, 1959), *Onibaba* (Shindo Keneto, 1964), *Kwaidan* (*Kaidan*, Tanaka Tokuzo, 1964) and *Sûito Homu* (*Sweet Home*, Kurosawa Kiyoshi, 1989).

The *kaidan* subgenre was responsible for the national and international resurgence of Japanese horror cinema at the turn of the twenty-first century. Key to this rise in popularity was Nakata Hideo’s *Ring*, which has been regarded as the most commercially successful film ever to be produced in Japan.⁵ *Ring* is paradigmatic of the *kaidan* formula, featuring a wronged female spirit who returns from the grave to seek revenge for the ill deeds that she suffered during her life. A wave of *kaidan* films followed in the wake of the success of *Ring*, with titles such as *Ju-On* (*Ju-On: The Grudge*, Shimizu Takashi 2002), *Honogurai mizu no soko kara* (*Dark Water*, Nakata Hideo 2002), *Isola: Tajuu jinkaku shôjo* (*Isola*, Mizutani Toshiyuki, 2000) and *Ekusute* (*Exte: Hair Extensions*, Sono Shion, 2007). These works display a number of motifs that appear to continually reoccur throughout the recent films of the subgenre. Water features heavily in many of the films, either through bodies of water such as the sea or through the driving rain that often accompanies impending interactions with the spirit world. Houses too play an important role, and the subgenre itself often crosses over into the corresponding subgenre of the haunted house film. These two motifs form part of the basis of the third key motif of the *kaidan* subgenre: these

⁴ Noriko T. Reider, ‘The Emergence of Kaidan-shû: The Collection of Tales of the Strange and Mysterious in the Edo period,’ *Asian Folklore Studies* 60, no. 1 (2001): 80.

⁵ Mark Cousins, *The Story of Film* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2004), 475.

films, with their narratives containing avenging and investigating mothers, are filled with objects that could be read as direct symbols of the maternal womb. From wells to water tanks, cupboards to coffins, these womblike spaces are positioned as key locations or symbolic objects within the films that have a direct connection with the maternal. Even though the womb phantasy can be read into the earlier *kaidan* films, those of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries appear to push womb symbolism and narratives concerning maternal love even more to the fore. This chapter will propose that this emphasis on the figure of the mother and the desire to be loved by her (the womb phantasy) is a direct result of the abrasion between the traditional idealised form of motherhood in Japan, and the changing position of women in Japanese society.

There is a common habit amongst theorists of Japanese horror cinema to call *kaidan* films ‘uncanny’ without fully exploring the full psychoanalytic definition of the term.⁶ The expression is used in the same manner in which it is positioned in the quotidian lexicon of English, to mean something strange and unnerving. However, following on from my analysis of *A Tale of Two Sisters* in the previous chapter, I propose that describing these films as uncanny is correct not just in this every day sense. As with Kim’s film, their heavy use of womb symbolism and mother-child narratives reflect Freud’s argument that the greatest source of the uncanny extends from the maternal body. Therefore Freud’s proposal haunts the background of this chapter, and even though it is an essay that is rarely referred to in Japanese psychoanalysis, the following chapter will show how *kaidan* films are an example of uncanny cinema *par excellence*.

⁶ For example: Jay McRoy, *Nightmare Japan*, 11; Richard J. Hand, ‘Aesthetics of Cruelty: Traditional Japanese Theatre and the Horror Film,’ in *Japanese Horror Cinema*, ed. by Jay McRoy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 26; and Myoungsook Park, ‘Hollywood’s Remake Practices Under the Copyright Regime,’ in *Fear, Cultural Anxiety and Transformation: Horror, Science Fiction and Fantasy Films Remade*, ed. by Scott A. Lukas and John Marmysz (Plymouth: Lexington, 2009), 118.

A potential reason for the neglect of the full psychoanalytic definition of the term uncanny could be due to a hesitation over using Freudian terms – and psychoanalytic theory in general – to discuss Japanese cinema. In the same manner that many people have questioned the usefulness of the application of psychoanalysis to film studies, many have also critiqued the combination of psychoanalysis and Japanese culture. For example, in 1953 the American psychoanalyst James Moloney published an article in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* arguing that there could be no such thing as Japanese psychoanalysis.⁷ Moloney believed that psychoanalysis would not be possible in Japan as the country was too group-orientated, writing that “The rights of the individual are held subsidiary to the principles of Japanese national entity: eighty million Japanese citizens are eighty million living cells which constitute the single body that is the person of Japan.”⁸ Moloney argued that the changes brought about by the American occupation had not altered society enough for Japanese psychoanalysts to be doing anything more than ‘paying lip service’ to Freud and his work. He contends that therefore Japanese psychoanalysts cannot have the same goal as those in the West, and instead they are more akin to psychiatrists, aiming to enable patients to adjust to society rather than attempting to free their individuality. Moloney declares that in Japan “there is no such thing (permissibly, at least) as a true individual who feels, thinks and acts voluntarily in a self-determined manner”, stating that from birth, Japanese family values shape children to understand their position within the nation.⁹ George DeVos also argues that Freudian theory cannot be applied to Japanese people due to its ‘religion of the family’. As well as arguing that Japanese culture is group-centered, DeVos contends that due to the subversive nature of

⁷ James Moloney, ‘Understanding the Paradox of Japanese Psychoanalysis,’ *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 34, no.4 (1953): 291-303.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 302.

psychoanalytic theories concerning family members, the typical Japanese person would instantly refute such ideas as a method of self-preservation.¹⁰

However, Japan does have an extensive history of psychoanalysis that is recognised by the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA), with a number of Japanese psychoanalysts producing research that is not only relevant to Japanese culture, but as they propose, could also have international implications. Further to this, as Ian Parker has argued, much of the Western view of the group culture of Japan comes from labour management practices that were actually introduced during the American occupation. Parker contends that in contemporary Japan the combination of growing individualism in the middle classes and increasing alienation in the working classes has led to a time where “the ‘collectivism’ of the Japanese now operates more as a nostalgic and ideological cultural practice than as the reality of lived experience”.¹¹

Although the first pieces of Japanese psychoanalytic research were published in 1912, it could be argued that psychoanalysis proper was not practiced in Japan until the work of Kosawa Heisaku in the 1930s.¹² Kosawa was one of the ‘first generation’ of Japanese psychoanalytically orientated psychiatrists known as the Tōhoku School, who were taught by Marui Kioyusu between the late 1920s and the 1940s. Marui had studied psychiatry in America and included psychoanalysis in his teaching of the subject when returning to Japan. With Freud’s permission Marui had set up the first Japanese branch of the IPA in Sendai. Okinogi Keigo writes that Kosawa questioned Marui’s method of teaching psychoanalytic theory without understanding Freudian

¹⁰ George DeVos, *The Incredibility of Western Prophets: The Japanese Religion of the Family* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1984).

¹¹ Ian Parker, *Japan in Analysis: Cultures of the Unconscious* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 13. Parker makes an interesting critique of Moloney’s paper in his text, arguing that his claim that Japanese psychoanalysts are more akin to psychiatrists is ironic as this was during the period where, against Freud’s wishes, American psychoanalysis was being dominated by psychiatry and medical training was necessary in order to practice.

¹² Okinogi Keigo, ‘Psychoanalysis in Japan,’ in *Freud and the Far East: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on the People and Culture of China, Japan, and Korea* ed. by Salman Akhtar (New York: Jason Aronson, 2009), 11.

psychoanalytic therapy.¹³ Kosawa left Japan to study at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute, visiting Freud at his home and presenting him with his own work. Once he had returned to Japan, Kosawa set up the first Japanese psychoanalytic practice, even seeing patients whilst under surveillance during the Second World War. After the end of the War and during the occupation the interest in Western culture and methods of learning led to Kosawa training and supervising a new generation of Japanese psychoanalysts, now known as the Kosawa school. Following Marui's death in 1953 Kosawa took over the directorship of the Japanese branch of the IPA and moved it to Tokyo, where it became the Japan Psychoanalytic Society.

Throughout the history of Japanese psychoanalytic theory the mother has been at its heart. For example, Kosawa's own predominant contribution to Japanese psychoanalysis is his theory of the Ajase complex, which can also be seen as a demonstration of how Japanese psychoanalysts have reworked Freudian theory in order to understand the Japanese unconscious. Kosawa agrees with Freud that there is a universal process by which children become adults and position themselves within society, but he argues that it is not the relationship with the father that guides this transition, but the dyadic relationship with the mother. Kosawa contends that instead of this parent-child relationship suddenly breaking during adolescence, it actually develops over time, with the child remaining constantly bound to its mother during the process of individualisation and the realisation that the mother is a person like any other. In the same manner that Freud turned to the myth of Oedipus to illustrate his theory, Kosawa used the story of the prince Ajase and the concept of reincarnation.¹⁴ The story of Ajase is different from that of Oedipus in the manner that it deals with guilt and fear. As Anne Allison notes, in Freud's conception of the development of

¹³ Okinogi, 'Psychoanalysis in Japan,' 11.

¹⁴ For a synopsis of this myth see appendix.

children boys reject incestuous desires for their mother due to the fear of castration by the father. “In the Ajasean paradigm,” Allison continues, “by contrast, boys are compelled to abandon not eroticism for their mothers, but hatred and resentment, and they are motivated to do this by a mother’s forgiveness rather than a father’s threat.”¹⁵ She contends that although the mother as idealised figure is lost in both cases, in the Ajase complex this loss enables the continuation of the mother-child relationship rather than its demise. However it could also be argued that, contrary to Allison’s analysis, there is still an element of the idealisation of the mother after Ajase’s revelation and following forgiveness, since the queen is celebrated for learning from her mistakes and loving her child unconditionally. Although her human nature is still tied to guilt, she is able to transcend this through her entry into the mythical maternal via an unconditional love that loves even when she is not loved back.

With its rich history of psychoanalytic theory it is surprising that more research has not been carried out outside of Japan interrogating film via the work of the country’s theorists. That Japanese psychoanalytic theory revolves around the mother-child dyad, and that much of Japan’s recent renaissance in horror cinema contain films that focus on this very same relationship, the need can be seen for a dialogue between Japanese psychoanalysis and the country’s film productions. Because of the key role of the maternal in its narratives the latest cycle of *kaidan* films presents itself as the perfect point of departure.

¹⁵ Anne Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), 4.

Transience and the Womb: Maternal Symbolism in the work of Nakata Hideo and Kitayama Osamu

A static-filled video starts with a black and white image of a man looking down at the camera from above, his torso visible against the grey circle of sky at the end of a black tunnel that reaches upwards. The clouds over his head roll like waves. His gaze directly meets the camera, a look of unsympathetic observation on his face. This is the opening image of a cursed videotape, a recording within a film seen by both the characters and the audience. Moving forward four years, spectators are presented with a similar scene in a different film, this time shot from above. This image is a psychic vision of one of the film's characters – a memory trace – again seen by both a character and the film's spectators. A small girl leans over the round opening of a large water tank, her shoulders over the hole in a match to the posture of the man, only shot in reverse. Her world too has been drained of colour, saturated with a murky, dirty yellow hue. A well and a water tank. Two graves for two young girls abandoned by their mothers. Two wombs that will allow them to be reborn as creatures of transience – ghosts – so that they may fulfil their wish of finding maternal love.



Figures 5.1 and 5.2: Watery tombs in *Ring* and *Dark Water*

These two scenes are taken respectively from Nakata Hideo's 1998 film *Ring*, and his 2002 release *Dark Water*. Both films are adaptations of novels by the Japanese writer Suzuki Kōji, a bestselling author in his native Japan whose work covers both

horror/fantasy fiction and works of social commentary and critique directed at fatherhood and the contemporary Japanese family. Using the psychoanalytic theories of Kitayama Osamu, this section will argue that these spaces are symbolic of the maternal womb. I propose that in the same manner that Freud argued that the belief in life in the womb provides the greatest support for the belief in an existence after death, these films present these womb-like spaces as portals to the afterlife for the female protagonists. Simultaneously, these spaces allow them to rediscover their lost mythical maternity and become 'ideal' mothers. By analysing this rediscovery I will propose that these films reinforce traditional Japanese family values, whilst revealing a fear of the rise of divorce, working mothers and single-parent families.

Ring and *Dark Water* are examples of the *kaidan* subgenre, featuring a wronged female spirit who returns from the grave to get vengeance on a world that treated her so badly. The two films share many of the same narrative features and motifs, such as both featuring single-mothers whose neglect of their children whilst they go out to work puts the child in direct danger from a malevolent force. The spirit in each case is that of a young girl whose treatment by her father after her mother's death or disappearance leads to her demise. The characters of Sadako in *Ring* and Mitsuko in *Dark Water* are aesthetically very similar as well, with long dark hair that covers their faces and putrid damp skin. Finally both girls died encased in watery tombs, locations that are accessed by Reiko and Yoshimi allowing them to come face to face with the spirit and regain their own maternal confidence.

Ring and *Dark Water* have acquired a vast field of scholarly attention. The writing that surrounds these films, as well as the *kaidan* subgenre in general, falls broadly into two categories. Either the research argues that the films act as metaphors for the fear of the changing role of the family and the mother in society and the infringement of

technology and modernity on tradition, or it views these works as a Japanese version of the monstrous feminine. However, mother-child relationships are critical to both areas. Jay McRoy, in his book *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema*, is positioned in the former, arguing that the ability of the *kaidan* stories to be continually revised and updated for a modern audience means that they can act as metaphors for contemporary issues. He writes:

careful analyses of the focus of the spirits' wrath, as well as the motivations behind their actions, provide valuable insights into the historical, political, gendered, and economic logics informing current socio-cultural tensions between nostalgic imaginings of a 'traditional Japanese' past and the equally illusory threat and/or promise of an ever-emerging technological, global and postmodern Japan.¹⁶

McRoy proposes that transformations within the family as connoted in these works can be read as displaying the wider socio-cultural changes that are taking place during the films' production. The years leading up to the releases of *Ring* and *Dark Water* saw a transformation in the formation of the average Japanese family, as well as with the position of men and women in society. Although the new Constitution introduced after the Second World War gave Japanese women greater equality, the ability to divorce their spouses and the right to vote, a woman's role was still predominantly seen to be that of a 'good wife, wise mother'.¹⁷ Likewise, the decades after the war saw the rapid economic growth of the country, which led in turn to a 'salaryman' culture where fathers would dedicate their lives to their companies in order to financially support their families. Long paternal working hours entailed that women

¹⁶ McRoy, *Nightmare Japan*, 76.

¹⁷ For the wider debate that surrounds the government's encouragement of the role of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' see: Richard Reitan, 'Claiming Personality: Reassessing the Dangers of the "New Woman" in Early Taishō Japan,' *Positions* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2011) and Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

had little opportunity to gain employment outside of their duties in the home.¹⁸ A number of employment initiatives were carried out in the 1980s and 1990s to try to encourage women into the work place; however, as Jeffrey Kingston notes, these were not accompanied by changing attitudes to housework and childcare responsibilities, leaving women little time to dedicate to full-time employment.¹⁹

When viewing *Ring* and *Dark Water* – two of the most financially successful examples of recent *kaidan* films – from this socially orientated perspective, the representation of the female characters could be seen to display the changing position of women in Japanese society. With their release dates of 1998 and 2002 they were made at a time when there was national concern about the rising level of divorce in Japan.²⁰ The period between 1993 and 2003 saw a 48% increase in divorce rates, leading to more than 20% of marriages now ending in divorce.²¹ Even though divorce is less stigmatised in Japan than it was in the decades following the war, as Kingston explains, patriarchal attitudes towards women that they should be housewives and mothers still remain entrenched in society.²² Reiko and Yoshimi are both divorced women who are struggling to bring up their children on their own. Although Reiko appears financially stable, her commitment to her job in order to receive this security means that she is unable to find time for her son and their relationship lacks much of the closeness seen as critical in the Japanese mother-child dyad. There is also the suggestion in Nakata's sequel to *Ring*, *Ringu 2* (*Ring 2*, Nakata Hideo, 1999), that Reiko is far from respected in her role as a reporter, with one of her work colleagues stating that "They don't give a single-mother important reports".

¹⁸ Anne E. Imamura, 'Family Culture,' in *The Cambridge Companion of Modern Japanese Culture* ed. by Yoshio Sugimoto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 76-91.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Kingston, *Japan in Transformation: 1952-2000* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 70.

²⁰ Jeffrey Kingston, *Contemporary Japan: History, Politics and Social Change since the 1980s* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²² Kingston, *Contemporary Japan*, 68.

Yoshimi on the other hand has a strong and positive relationship with her daughter, and appears to be reasonably respected in her role as a proof reader. However, her need to financially support herself and her daughter through this low-wage job means that she must work long hours and at times prioritise her employment over the care of Ikuko. Ultimately, the jobs of Reiko and Yoshimi could be seen as putting their children at risk. If Reiko were not researching the cursed videotape, then Yoichi would never have been able to see it. Further to this, if she had focused on his well-being more, she could have ensured that the video was never within his reach. In *Dark Water*, Mitsuko's attacks on Ikuko grow as the mother spends more time away from her daughter. Yoshimi allows herself to be taken in by the investigation of the missing girl and leaves her daughter open to attack when she tries to satisfy her own curiosity. Critically, Yoshimi's employment causes her to fail to collect her daughter from school, aligning this occurrence with her own mother and that of Mitsuko's, who did not pick up their children from school due to mental instability, leading to their eventual abandonment of their children. In other words, *Dark Water* appears to suggest that if a mother works, and this means that at times she may not be able to revolve her life around her child, that this is on a level with a mother who either consciously neglects her child, or abandons him or her altogether. In these two films, working mothers are punished for not being in the home enough, a punishment that is played out through a danger to their child.

Therefore, like divorce, child abuse through neglect can be seen as another social issue represented in these films. Since the Japanese government began to collect data on child abuse cases in 1990, the amount of reported incidents increased from 1101 in 1990 to 10,000 in 1999.²³ Kingston believes that this vast increase in numbers

²³ Kingston, *Contemporary Japan*, 76.

displays not only the extent of the problem, but also a shift in the attitude of what should be considered as abuse and a greater willingness for it to be reported and dealt with outside of the family unit. Kingston writes: “Mothers commit most cases of abuse, isolated as they sometimes are in anonymous urban communities, in many cases living far from their relatives.”²⁴ He argues that the growth in abuse can be seen to match the growth in single-parent families, as in comparison to the more traditional Japanese family structure there are fewer people to assist with child rearing, or to monitor any inappropriate behaviour.

Reiko’s willingness to leave Yoichi alone for extended periods of time could be considered ‘inappropriate behaviour’ or even neglect. Yoichi is rarely seen playing and is emotionally blank for the majority of the film. Mother and child are not physically or verbally affectionate to each other, suggesting that Reiko’s focus on her job has led to Yoichi being emotionally underdeveloped.²⁵ In *Dark Water* Yoshimi’s relationship with Ikuko is far more affectionate, and Ikuko appears to be a happy, contented and loving child. Yet one of the key narrative subtexts of the film is the suggestion that abuse and neglect repeat themselves through the generations of a family. Yoshimi was neglected and abandoned by her mother, and she goes on to neglect and abandon her own daughter.

Consequently, a reading of *kaidan* films as metaphors for the changes in the Japanese family set-up would revolve around the mother who is not fulfilling her proper role of ‘good wife, wise mother’. The popularity of these films could be due therefore to them acting as a depiction of the fear of the erosion of Japanese culture due to changing family values, as well as being moral lessons in the dangers that this

²⁴ Kingston, *Contemporary Japan*, 77.

²⁵ However, when the young boy comes into contact with his grandfather he acts in a manner normal for a boy of his age, wanting to play and being affectionate and enthusiastic. Therefore the film could be seen to suggest that Yoichi is in need of a more traditional extended family set-up in order to be a happy child.

erosion can cause. In the majority of these narratives, the mother who fails to be ‘traditionally’ maternal and endangers her child is eventually able to regain her mythic maternity through an interaction with a ghost; she is rightly punished, sees the error of her ways, and patriarchal order is resumed.

In contrast, theorists who approach the work from a psychoanalytic and usually feminist perspective argue that these films feature Japanese versions of the monstrous feminine. Ruth Goldberg, for example, argues that *Ring* is a form of *haha-mono* (mother film) that features a *bukimi-na haha*, a “nightmare mother who has a special link to madness or the supernatural”.²⁶ She argues that *Ring* is part of a rich heritage of ‘uncanny mother’ films in Japan and that the makers of these works that are “a national rendering of the universally visceral experience that was defined by Freud as ‘the uncanny’”.²⁷ Goldberg’s essay can be read as an example of two interlinked problems that persist in the field of Western research that surrounds *kaidan* films. First, there is the continual use of the term uncanny to describe these films without a full exploration of the intricacies of the expression, and second, theorists persist in using this Freudian term without proper attention to issues of universalism and the Japanese psyche.²⁸

As detailed at the beginning of this thesis, the womb can be seen as the greatest source of the uncanny in Freud’s essay ‘The Uncanny’. Even though theorists such as Goldberg focus on the maternal in their research on *kaidan* films, and they use the uncanny in relation to these maternal narratives, the importance of the womb to these

²⁶ Ruth Goldberg, ‘Demons in the Family: Tracking the Japanese “Uncanny Mother Film”,’ in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, 373.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 371.

²⁸ For example see also: Nina K. Martin, ‘Dread of Mothering: Plumbing the Depths of *Dark Water*’, *Jump Cut* 50 (Spring 2008), no pagination, accessed September 1, 2015 <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc50.2008/darkWater/>.

Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., ‘Technoghosts and Culture Shocks: Sociocultural Shifts in American Remakes of J-Horror,’ *Post Script* 28, no. 2 (Winter-Spring 2009): 72.

works has been continually neglected. Goldberg describes the uncanny as “intellectual uncertainty, the return of the repressed, the appearance of the double, the eerie, atmospheric transformation of what is most familiar into something unfamiliar”,²⁹ whilst Chika Kinoshita in her essay on *Rufuto (Loft)*, Kurosawa Kiyoshi, 2005) writes:

Freud locates the uncanny, both in real psychic life and in fiction, in the two sets of phenomena: (1) the indiscernibility of the living and the dead, the animate and the inanimate, and the human and nonhuman, and (2) repetition.³⁰

Both essays examine the experience of the uncanny encouraged by *kaidan* films, and both talk about motherhood, but neither explores Freud’s discussion of the womb in ‘The Uncanny’. Further to this, Goldberg, Kinoshita or any of the other scholars in the wider field that have used the term ‘uncanny’ to describe *kaidan* films, have not attempted to analyse the extent to which this term can be used in the discussion of the Japanese society. Yet through engaging with the importance of the womb to the uncanny it can be shown how these films revolve around conscious and repressed feelings about the maternal, and therefore also enable a critical engagement with the application of psychoanalytic theory to Japanese cultural products such as film.

I propose that the well in *Ring* and the water tank in *Dark Water* should both be read as womb symbols. In the same way that the cupboards and bathrooms of American slasher films, the damp tunnels and warm houses of contemporary French horror cinema, and the ponds and haunted houses of the Korean family horrors, can all be read as symbols of the maternal womb, these two small cramped spaces fulfil Freud’s criteria for symbolic representations of the womb, being hollow containers with their openings depicted. The well and the water tank are both liquid containers with a round opening at the top. In the films the camera is placed both exterior to, and

²⁹ Goldberg, ‘Demons in the Family,’ 371.

³⁰ Chika Kinoshita, ‘The Mummy Complex: Kurosawa Kiyoshi’s *Loft* and J-Horror’, in *Horror to the Extreme*, 106.

inside, these receptacles, stressing their function as containers. The use of shots from inside and outside these objects encourages two possible perspectives in the unconscious, that of a phantasy of being in the womb and looking out, and therefore also a phantasy of birth, and repressed memories of the first conception of the female genitals as something that is interior as well as exterior.

Further to this, in Suzuki's original short story 'Floating Water', on which the screenplay for *Dark Water* was based, the author appears to stress the human bodily quality of the water tank. It is described as "creamy-skinned" and "flesh-coloured" with a "coffin-shaped body" and "two cord-like objects" swinging from its base.³¹ The author's description of Mitsuko's tomb recalls the maternal body, specifically the reproductive and birthing maternal body, through the umbilical cords that hang from underneath and the murky and amniotic-like water that is contained within. This would suggest that the Freudian reading of the tank as a womb symbol may not be simply a case of projecting Western psychoanalytical theory onto an Eastern cultural production, but is actually something that the Japanese author intended in the first place. The womb, and birth, also feature in Suzuki's book *Ring*. When watching the cursed video – the contents of which differ from that of the one in the film – the male protagonist of the book (Asakawa Kazuyuki) sees an image of a newborn baby being held by a woman's hands:

Totally absorbed in the image, Asakawa found himself holding his hands in the same position. He heard the birth cry directly below his own chin. Startled, he pulled back his hands. He had felt something. Something warm and wet – like amniotic fluid, or blood – and the weight of flesh. Asakawa jerked his hands apart, as if casting something aside, and brought his palms close to his face. A smell lingered. The faint smell of blood – had it come from the womb, or...?³²

³¹ Suzuki Kōji, 'Floating Water' in *Dark Water* [1996] (London: Harper Collins, 2005) 11-50.

³² Suzuki Kōji, *Ring* [1991], trans. Robert B. Rohmer and Glynne Walley (London: Harper Collins, 2007), 102.

Like Sadako's video in Nakata's film version of this story, the last scene on the tape in the novel is also of the well, although this time it is from the perspective of Sadako herself looking up at a man from the bottom as he drops rocks down on top of her. The cry of the baby from the birth scene is heard by Asakawa over this image, reinforcing a link between birth and death that can be seen to underpin the *kaidan* subgenre.

Alongside the symbolic wombs of the well and the water tank in *Ring* and *Dark Water*, the role of water in these films is critical. In an interview with the Japanese arts and culture magazine *Kateigaho*, Nakata explains the connection between water and birth in Japanese life, describing how "walking along a body of water, you sense being born".³³ Later on in this article the director also draws links between water and the spiritual arguing that "Japanese ghosts are supposed to appear wherever the water exists".³⁴ In these films the link between water, the spiritual and the maternal can clearly be seen. In *Ring* a local myth on the island where Sadako grew up suggests that she was fathered by a sea beast. In *Ring 2* Sadako's uncle explains how her mother Shizuko had gone off to give birth alone in a small cave on the beach where local women would leave their unwanted newborns to be washed away by the sea. He recalls: "She came back after the birth saying she'd put the baby away in the sea. But the next day she had a baby in her arms". This could either suggest that her own baby had died and she had taken one left by another woman, or that Sadako really was a child from the sea, supporting her spiritual ability to return from the grave, make the deadly video, and control the elements around her.

³³ Quoted in: Mark Kermode, 'Spirit Levels,' *Sight & Sound* 15, no.8 (August 2005): no pagination, accessed August 20 2015,

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1824414/fulltext/877EA19187464907PQ/1?accountid=11862>

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Ring and *Ring 2* feature numerous shots of the rolling waves of the ocean as though it is an ominous character in its own right. The sea features in Sadako's video too, where the static that intermittently interrupts the video recording acts as a visual double to the boiling white wash of the water that surrounds the girl's childhood home. When Reiko analyses the cursed tape in more depth she is able to make out one sentence spoken over the images, with a ghostly and distorted voice warning that when you play with water, monsters will come. As the narrative progresses and Reiko and Ruiji unveil more of Sadako's life, the sea surrounding the island where she lived gets rougher and rougher, until it reaches typhoon levels when they attempt to leave to exhume her body from its watery grave.

In addition to the sea acting as symbolic double for Sadako's rage, rain acts as visual representation of the emotional predicament of the film's characters. In one scene where Yoichi walks to school by himself the rain hammers down on him, weighing down his umbrella so that he can barely hold it up against the force of the water. The small boy sees a man in front of him and after the two share a brief look of recognition they walk past each other. The man is Ruiji, Yoichi's father. Therefore the rain acts as a visualisation of Yoichi's familial predicament: the legacy of his parents' separation weighing him down with emotional baggage like the rain pouring against his umbrella. Nakata continues to use rain as an external representation of a character's emotional state and as a conduit for a spirit's rage in *Dark Water*. Whereas in *Ring* and *Ring 2* the credit sequences start with the image and sound of the ocean, in *Dark Water* it is the sound of dripping water and a view of murky liquid that opens the film. The water is light brown and has a viscosity to it reminiscent of amniotic fluid. The colour tones of this opening image are matched in the following scene where a small girl waits for her mother to pick her up from school as the rain

hammers down outside the window. The colour of the light in this shot recalls the quality of sunlight before a storm, and the framing of the view through the window compresses the image of the girl, making the scene feel oppressive and humid. Therefore in the first two shots of the film water is linked to both the maternal and a sense of foreboding.

The *mise en scène* of *Dark Water* is damp, mouldy and imposing. Yoshimi and Ikuko's new apartment is rotting around them, with dark stains growing on its ceilings. Rain constantly batters the buildings that enclose them, whether it is their own apartment or Ikuko's school, and in a number of scenes dripping water or puddles signal the supernatural presence of Mitsuuko. Water is also the means by which the ghost girl is able to enter the real world and attack Ikuko. When Yoshimi is out solving the secret of Mitsuuko's disappearance, Ikuko is left alone in the apartment. The taps turn themselves on, gushing dirty water into their home. Ikuko tries to turn the bathroom taps off but instead is dragged into the water by the rotting corpse of Mitsuuko.



Figures 5.3 - 5.6: The looming exterior and damp interior of Yoshimi and Ikuko's apartment in *Dark Water*

Nina K. Martin argues that the crumbling and leaking walls that surround mother and child are a physical manifestation of Yoshimi's increasingly fragile mental state under the strain of attempting to balance the roles of financial provider and devoted caregiver.³⁵ As Yoshimi's search for Mitsuko becomes more frantic, and her neglect of Ikuko more prominent, the damp patch on their ceiling begins to grow, their tap water becomes more polluted, and the stern architecture of the building appears even more imposing. In the same manner that Creed argues how the cellars and tunnels of the American horror film recreate the interior of the monstrous mother's womb, the rotting walls of Yoshimi and Ikuko's apartment are transformed into a symbol of the failure of the single mother to protect and provide for her child. Tellingly, it is only once Yoshimi has given up her life to care for Mitsuko and entered into the realm of the mythical maternal that the apartment is finally clean and dry.

Even with Suzuki's original description of the tank in *Dark Water* in mind, it is still important to approach any Freudian influenced readings of these films with caution. In order to carefully navigate the arguments and critiques of universalism, attention to the Japanese psyche must be paid. In Japan one psychoanalyst has relied heavily on the symbolism contained in myths and folklore to understand the Japanese individual and society. Kitayama Osamu grew up in post-war Japan where the study of myth and folklore had been banned due to its use during the war to legitimize the domination of the Emperor. After studying in the West, Kitayama was struck by the reliance on such stories to explain psychoanalytical theories, and began researching culturally specific myths and folk tales to assist his own theoretical and practical work.

³⁵ Nina K. Martin, 'Dread of Mothering,' no pagination.

Kitayama believes that the analysis of myths and folktales can provide cultural clues about how humans reveal their own unconscious phantasies and their history.³⁶ As with the Japanese analysts that preceded him, Kitayama focuses predominantly on the mother-child dyad. Influenced by the work of Winnicott and Melanie Klein, as well as Freud himself, Kitayama draws upon the vast number of Japanese folktales that he believes demonstrate a specific Japanese variation of the Oedipal theme, and argues that his clinical experience supports the existence of this theme in the phantasies of Japanese neurotics.³⁷ Key to his work is the interpretation of symbols in these stories, and the messages that they represent, specifically in relation to the pre-Oedipal mother. Kitayama contends that these folk tragedies “reveal unsolved conflicts in terms of the infant-mother relationship, that is, a two-body relationship rather than the typical triangular situation”.³⁸ In his analysis of Kosawa’s Ajase complex, Kitayama stresses the need for the idealised mother to be completely devoted to her child, even to the point of masochism. She is encouraged to find pride in this self-injuring or deprecating behaviour, with such striving also leading to feelings of guilt in the mother (that she is not loving more) and the child. Kitayama calls this behaviour “masochistic caretaking”, arguing that it is culturally transmitted: “it seems to form the background for masochistic altruism which we take as our cultural feminine ideal”.³⁹ Throughout his work Kitayama draws upon a number of well-known Japanese myths and legends that feature a relationship between a husband and wife that he believes have provided people throughout history with the ability to express their unconscious phantasies surrounding the maternal. Kitayama separates the

³⁶ Kitayama Osamu, ‘Transience: Its Beauty and Danger,’ *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 79, no.5 (1998): 937.

³⁷ Kitayama Osamu, ‘Pre-Oedipal “Taboo” in Japanese Folk Tragedies,’ *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 12 (1985): 173.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Kitayama Osamu, ‘The Wounded Caretaker and Guilt,’ *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 18 (1991): 232.

folktales of marital relationships down into three categories, dependent on the husband's relationship towards their wives: depressive, ambivalent and paranoid. First the depressive relationship can be considered as a story that involves the loss of an object, such as the popular legend of Urashima Taro. In this tale a boy visits an underwater palace where he falls in love with a princess and marries her, and the couple spend three happy days together. The boy starts to miss his parents and asks to return to the surface, whereupon his wife gives him a box but instructs him not to look inside. He returns to his home but discovers that many years have passed during his short period under water and that his family are dead. He becomes depressed and opens the box and breaking the prohibition of 'don't look', only to age quickly and die.

Kitayama argues that many of the themes in Urashima Taro are prevalent in other popular Japanese myths, specifically those that contain a marriage between a human man and a non-human wife. Kitayama argues that these largely display an ambivalent relationship between the hero and his initially 'ideal' wife, who after the breaking of the prohibition of 'don't look' is revealed as being an animal, usually one from the sea. These stories begin with a man fulfilling his wish of finding a devoted and beautiful wife, who often has an ability to support him financially as well, such as the Clam Wife who makes beautiful food, or the Crane Wife who weaves cloth from her own feathers. The husbands take advantage of their wives' abilities, even in some cases after the knowledge of her true identity is revealed, and this combined with the breaking of the 'don't look' prohibition, leads to the departure of the wife.

Finally the paranoid relationship between husband and wife can be seen in the myth of Izanagi-Izanami. Here two gods descend to an island so that they can marry and give birth to more gods and islands. The maternal deity Izanami dies in the process of

giving birth to the fire god. Her husband Izanagi follows her to the land of the dead whereupon she tells him that she will discuss her desire to return to the living with the other gods but that he must not look at her. He breaks this prohibition and looks at her corpse, angering both Izanami and the other gods. She tries to get revenge on her husband but he manages to divorce her and escape.

It is important to note that the sea or bodies of water feature in many of these stories, with water acting as a signifier for the feminine domain: Urashima must dive into the water to find a woman to love, the stork is a bird who is associated with ponds and lakes, the clam wife is a sea creature. The significance of water in these myths, specifically the sea, would suggest that reading the use of water in *Ring* and *Dark Water* as a symbol of the maternal is simply recalling a vast history of such symbolism in Japanese culture and art. Kitayama's research also demonstrates how Sadako's backstory of having been fathered by a sea beast can be seen as a contemporary reinterpretation of these ancient myths. Instead of an animal mother and a human husband having a relationship, a woman turns to an animal to have a child and then brings this child up with her human husband. Both Sadako and her mother therefore can be seen as being animalistic through their links to the sea, and their human husband/father on the realisation of this fact – the vision of Sadako's monstrosity – is driven to kill her.

Kitayama argues that in these myths and legends, the secrets that the heroes are prohibited from seeing all revolve around maternal qualities: cooking, weaving, breast feeding, or in the case of Urashima Taro, opening items that symbolise the maternal body (the box representing the female reproductive organs). He writes: "It is my interpretation that these heroines are derived from the infantile wish-fulfilment towards the mother. The wives of the tales are very forward and devoted like a

mother”.⁴⁰ He contends that the husbands are often demanding and childlike, requiring a level of care from their wives that is in some cases detrimental to the woman/animal’s life, and the men are often unable to accept the truth behind how the special items that the women are able to produce are made. The husband also denies his own knowledge that the production of these items causes damage to his wife’s body, making her abject: “The hero splits the mother figure into the benevolent woman and the damaged animal by a process accompanied by idealization and ‘animalization’. They never seem compatible with each other in the tales”.⁴¹ As Andra Alvis has noted, Kitayama’s theory is situated within an object relations approach, with the prohibition of ‘don’t look’ being put in place as a stage before the realisation of the mother’s genital difference.⁴² Kitayama argues that in opposition to a taboo, this prohibition is designed to be broken. He believes that the sight of the mother’s genitals causes guilt in the child over the damage done to her body during childbirth. This vision represents the realisation of the physicality of the mother in the mind of the child, combining their own guilt, with a sense of disgust, disillusionment, and shame that is directed at the female body. It is this discussion of the split in the mother between the benevolent woman and the damaged animal that aligns Kitayama’s work with Kristeva’s. Once the prohibition of ‘don’t look’ is broken the child is faced with the reality of their birth. They are the special objects that the women in these myths produce for their husbands, so they come from a place that is both horrific and loving. The mother is given two faces, and it is her knowledge of her own abject and animalistic face that encourages her to leave her child in these myths,

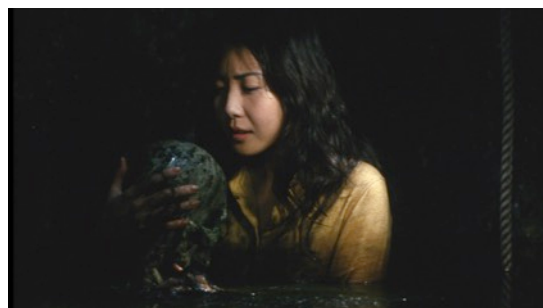
⁴⁰ Kitayama, ‘Pre-Oedipal “Taboo”,’ 179.

⁴¹ Ibid., 180.

⁴² Andra Alvis, ‘Psychoanalysis in Japan,’ *International Institute for Asian Studies Newsletter* 30, (March 2003): 9.

in the same manner that the Kristevan mother must make herself abject so as to push her child into patriarchal society.

This acceptance by the mother that she is abject and loving acts as the key turning point in the narratives of *Ring* and *Dark Water*. It is the moment when Reiko and Yoshimi regain their mythical maternity, become ‘good wives, wise mothers’ and restore patriarchal order. Yet it is a restoration that is tinged with punishment due to the sacrifices that they have to make. Crucially, these moments within the narratives of *Ring* and *Dark Water* occur when the mother figures enter into the symbolic womb spaces of the ghosts and resurrect their corpses. The two films do this in slightly different ways. In *Ring* Reiko goes down into the well where Sadako died and ‘gives birth’ to her corpse by the evacuation of water through the well’s opening. When she discovers Sadako’s body she holds it close against her chest, speaking softly to the young girl. In this moment of tenderness Reiko demonstrates a level of affection that she has not been able to show to her own son. Although Reiko has not managed to lift Sadako’s curse, she does discover the key to saving Yoichi, with her experience strengthening their bond and leading in *Ring 2* to her giving up her job so that she may spend time with her son.



Figures 5.7 and 5.8: Mitsuko and Sadako’s watery re-births in *Dark Water* and *Ring*

The moment of realisation and rebirth into the mythical maternal in *Dark Water* differs as it occurs in a secondary womb space that is distinct from the grave of Mitsuko; the lift to Yoshimi and Ikuko’s apartment. It is in this small space where

Mitsuko first interacts with Yoshimi, holding on to her hand in an unnerving scene of mistaken identity. At the climax of the film when Yoshimi believes that she is rescuing Ikuko from Mitsuko and sits hugging her in the lift, it is revealed that she is actually holding the dead girl's corpse that had momentarily taken on the form of her daughter. The real Ikuko walks down the hallway towards her mother and it is at this point when Yoshimi realises that the only way she is able to save her daughter is by abandoning her and becoming a mother to Mitsuko in the spirit world. As the lift doors close on Yoshimi and Mitsuko, it fills up with water as it slowly rises away from Ikuko. By the time the young girl has run to the next floor and pressed the button to open the doors the lift has filled with water and her mother and the ghost have gone. Therefore the key event in each of the narratives of *Ring* and *Dark Water* is the point when the mother enters into the symbolic womb space and rediscovers her mythical maternity. Consequently, in both films there is a point where the mothers risk their lives so that they can help the ghost child, with Yoshimi actually giving up her life. Although this means that both Yoichi and Ikuko risk losing their mothers, Reiko and Yoshimi are able to shed their inability to 'mother' properly and enter into a realm of motherhood that is mythical: an all-consuming spiritual form of motherhood that gives everything, even their life, to the child. They are reborn into an idealised form of motherhood.

This mythical motherhood is akin to that seen in the Korean films analysed in the previous chapter, however it is important to note that it has not been fully carried through into the American remakes of *Ring* and *Dark Water*. As I discussed at the start of this chapter, Nakata's *kaidan* films have received a great deal of international attention, and were remade as financially lucrative American productions. Therefore these films and their remakes provide an incredibly useful case study for exploring the

international language of womb symbolism and how different approaches to the maternal are represented in horror cinema. *The Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002) and *Dark Water* (Walter Salles, 2005) are remarkably similar in narrative and aesthetic to their Japanese source material, and critically, the key womb symbols and how they are engaged with in each work has been carried across from East to West.

It is important to note that *Ring* and *Dark Water* (2002) are very much transnational texts to begin with. As John Chua points out, in *Ring* Nakata's version of Suzuki's story made it easily adaptable in the first place, by having certain traits such as a 'Final Girl' with an urban lifestyle which was easily transplanted into an American setting.⁴³ In his essay 'The Original and the Copy: Nakata Hideo's *Ring*', Julian Stringer presents a similar argument, showing how Verbinski's American remake of *Ring* used Nakata's film as its source text rather than Suzuki's novel.⁴⁴ In the novel Sadako is a hermaphrodite who is raped and murdered by a doctor at the hospital where her father is being treated. During the rape he infects her with the small pox virus which combines with her rage to create the Ring Virus, with the virus being the real source of evil rather than Sadako herself. Therefore, by moving the narrative into a more familial setting and by removing the element of Sadako's hermaphroditism, her rape, and the role of the small pox virus, Nakata and his screenwriter Takahashi Hiroshi align the novel's narrative more closely with the traditional *kaidan* plot whilst also reworking it for the contemporary generation through its troubling of changing family values. Verbinski's remake did not choose to return to the original source material, but instead took the themes and motifs from the Japanese film and adapted them for the American market.

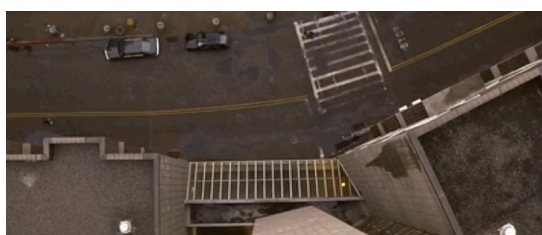
⁴³ John Chua, cited in Xu, 'Remaking East Asia,' 192.

⁴⁴ Julian Stringer, 'The Original and the Copy: Nakata Hideo's *Ring* (1998),' in: *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* ed. by Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2007).

Even though there are remarkable similarities between the Japanese films and their American remakes, there is one key difference which reflects each country's history of horror cinema as well as its relation to motherhood: the depiction of the link between monstrosity and maternity. In *Ring* Sadako's mother Shizuko is a caring figure who loves her child unconditionally. She too has psychic powers like her daughter, although she does not use her abilities against people and is represented as being passive and innocent. It is insinuated that after believing that Sadako was responsible for the death of a journalist at a press conference Shizuko slowly goes mad and eventually commits suicide, but she never stops loving her daughter. Yet through death she does abandon Sadako, leaving her open to her father's abuse. Conversely, in Verbinski's *The Ring*, Anna (the Shizuko character) adopts Samara (Sadako) after suffering a string of miscarriages and stillborn children. Anna does not have psychic powers, yet she is described as having 'hallucinations' instead, suggesting madness rather than any supernatural ability, and her insanity leads her first to imprison her daughter and then later to kill her by pushing her down the well. Therefore, in the same manner that can be seen in modern American horror, Anna's monstrosity can be regarded as something that comes from within her. She fails to love Samara unconditionally, and even though the young girl uses her power maliciously, her evil nature and need to kill the living after death can be seen as the result of her ill treatment by her parents. Likewise, Salles' version of *Dark Water* plays far more heavily on the increasingly fragile mental state of mother Dahlia, leading the audience to wonder throughout the film whether the ghostly events are all just in her mind. Therefore in both American remakes the mental state of the mother

characters is pushed to the fore, and in the case of *The Ring*, this is the root of the monstrosity over an external spiritual force.⁴⁵

However, importantly for this thesis there are some crucial similarities between these works that reinforce the position of the womb phantasy as one that is internationally experienced. The key motif in both the Japanese and American versions of these *kaidan* films is the link between water, the spiritual and motherhood. Water saturates all of these films, even pervading their paratextual material, such as the sound of dripping water playing over the Dreamworks before the start of Verbinski's film. *Ring*, *Ring 2*, *The Ring*, *The Ring 2*, *Dark Water* (2002) and *Dark Water* (2005) all have either credit sequences or opening scenes that depict water, rain or the sea. All of these films, whether Japanese or American, use water as an ominous force, either to signify the presence of a ghost, or as a site of death. This is none more so the case than with Salles' *Dark Water*, which at times feels like a shot-for-shot remake of Nakata's film, with the choice of shot angle, *mise en scène*, colouring and framing all reflecting the ever present dampness that saturates the Japanese work.



Figures 5.9 - 5.11: *Dark Water* (2005) recreating the damp aesthetic of its source material

⁴⁵ Valerie Wee has written extensively on the differences between Nakata's films and their American remakes. See: Valerie Wee, *Japanese Horror Films and their American Remakes: Translating Fear, Adapting Culture* (London: Routledge, 2014).

In the *Ring* and *Dark Water* films the water tank and the well in the American and Japanese versions are visually almost identical, and their significance within the plot is equally critical to the individual films. Although, as Nakata mentioned in his interview with *Kateigaho* quoted earlier, water is specifically linked to the spiritual in Japan, the ease at which this connection is carried over into these American works suggests that such symbolism is culturally transferable and accepted by Western audiences. This is even more so the case when it comes to the well and the water tank, as both fulfil Freud's criteria for being symbolic of the maternal womb – a Western theory that is supported by an Eastern depiction. In the American remakes, as with the original Japanese works, it is the interaction with these two womb-spaces that allows the troubled mothers to regain their mythical maternity. One slight variation, although it is still one that supports the transnational nature of womb symbolism, is that it is the apartment bathroom rather than the lift where Dahlia in *Dark Water* (2005) has to save her daughter by agreeing to become a mother to the young ghost.

Therefore, even though there may be important differences in the films' narratives through the links between madness and maternity, the role and appearance of womb symbolism remains the same in both the Japanese and American works. As discussed in Chapter 3, the idea of a mythical maternal is very present in American horror cinema – as is maternal madness throughout the history of Japanese film – but I believe that the two adaptations studied here do show how the Japanese films more clearly play out the idea of an ascension to a mythical maternity as a goal positioned for women in a time of patriarchal instability.

Nevertheless, returning to the Japanese films there is a key difference between the mother characters in *Ring* and *Dark Water*. As previously discussed, in *Dark Water* Yoshimi is willing to give up her life in order to save Ikuko, even though she knows

the damage that maternal abandonment can cause. Reiko does not make this choice. Realising that making a copy and showing it to someone can lift Sadako's curse, she makes a telephone call to her father asking him for a favour to help Yoichi. Rather than kill herself, she is willing to kill her father. Subsequently both films end in the continuation of a cycle, yet Yoshimi sacrifices her own life, whereas Reiko sacrifices the life of her father. It would appear that Yoshimi's choice was the correct one as the grown up Ikuko appears to be healthy and happy, in opposition to Yoichi who is mentally scarred by his ordeal and Reiko herself is killed in *Ring 2*. The mother who is willing to give everything, including her own life, for her child is represented as being a positive figure, a maternal goddess almost, whereas Reiko meets an early demise.

The particular focus on cycles in these two films can be seen as very insightful and lending itself to their overall themes of the spiritual and the maternal. There is the cycle of life and death that is represented in the return of spirits from the grave, and the cycle of life that is enabled through the maternal. The ability for women to give birth is also through the reproductive cycle of ovulation and then the excretion of menstrual blood. Therefore the womb stands as the symbol of the cycle of life. In his essay 'The Metaphysics of the Womb in Mishima Yukio's *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*' Hagiwara Takao argues that the womb has to involve both mother and foetus in a cyclic and vertical relationship:

The foetus itself is both unconscious and alive, simultaneously symbolising death and life. The womb, for its part, is both a beginning (life/foetus) and an end (death/mother); its time, or rather non-time, is cyclic and in the last analysis momentary and vertical.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Hagiwara Takao, 'The Metaphysics of the Womb in Mishima Yukio's *The Sailor Who Fell From Grace with the Sea*,' *Journal of the Association of the Teachers of Japanese* 33, no. 2 (Oct 1999): 37.

Hagiawara's argument appears to echo Freud's belief that womb phantasies "afford the deepest unconscious basis for the belief in survival after death, which merely represents the projection into the future of this uncanny life before birth."⁴⁷ This could be one answer as to why *kaidan* films, with their focus on spirits returning from the grave to haunt those on the material plane, feature an abundance of womb and birth symbolism. In each film, the possibility of life after death and the importance of the womb in the circle of life, are represented through a series of cycles of symbolic rebirth. A daughter is born from the maternal womb, her mother abandons her, and then she falls/is pushed down into a womb space where her spirit is once more detached from her body. A mother gives birth to a child, but then must abandon that child in order to enter the womb space and be reborn into maternity, aligning her own biological maternity with her newly acquired mythical (spiritual) status. Through this acquisition she allows the dead daughter to be reborn as well by becoming a mother figure to her. The dead daughter's body and spirit are momentarily realigned, before she again departs into the spirit world, eventually taking the mother with her.

Traditionally in Japan death is not seen as the end of a relationship, but instead as a temporary separation.⁴⁸ Kitayama has drawn on this belief in his work on transience as an emotional state, arguing that even though Freud himself did not believe in life after death, it is an integral part of Japanese cultural history, and therefore must be considered in Japanese psychoanalysis. Using *Ukiyo-e* – ancient Japanese woodblock prints – and folklore, Kitayama argues that transience plays a key role in the Japanese psyche. This transience is not a phenomenological form of movement, nor in this case is Kitayama looking at transitional objects in the same manner as Winnicott. Instead, Kitayama argues that the emotional experience of transience can be summed up in the

⁴⁷ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 400-401 n. 3.

⁴⁸ Kaya Wataru, 'Amae in the Life Cycle, Mourning and Termination,' cited in Kitayama, 'Transience', 947.

words of one of his patients: “Everything that is born must die. Nothing remains unchanged. Things come and things go. So everything is transient, yet life is worth living.”⁴⁹ This transience reflects the impermanence of life, and the duality of presence and absence, represented in the *Ukiyo-e* through images that Kitayama labels as ‘viewing together’. These pictures show a mother and child looking at an object that is impermanent in nature, such as soap bubbles, the reflection of a face in water, or a melting snow rabbit. He writes: “This process is not only *fort/da*, but also *da/fort*, that is presence/absence”.⁵⁰ These images show a process of transition akin to that which appears in Winnicott’s theory, as they can be seen to represent the movement through childhood, but they also represent a wider more philosophical or spiritual understanding of transience as something inevitable and melancholic, but also beautiful, and an integral part of the Japanese psyche.

Two important points can be drawn out of Kitayama’s work on transience that relate to the *kaidan* subgenre. Firstly, although transience represents the impermanence of things, it is not symbolic of death, but separation. He explains how scholars of Japanese literature have argued that historically the people of Japan have favoured stories that end in separation rather than death, leading Kitayama to contend that within this separation, there is the possibility for the person to come back and for the story to be repeated. Secondly, the key relationship in the experience of transience is that between a mother and her child. The process of a child growing into adulthood and leaving the mother’s side is reinterpreted in the myths and stories as the mother being separated from the child, or in the *Ukiyo-e* as mother and child ‘viewing together’ an object in the process of departure. Therefore the mother is the symbol of transience, of presence and separation, and of the biological end of death and the

⁴⁹ Kitayama, ‘Transience,’ 938.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 939.

mythical everlasting and returning soul. This understanding of the link between maternity and the afterlife supports the assertion made in Chapter 1 that the womb phantasy is not a reformulation of the death drive. Instead the mother is linked to death in a cyclical manner, and a reunification with her is as much a beginning as it is an end. In Japanese culture, as with the majority of films discussed in this thesis that feature ghosts, death does not signify a complete and total end, but rather a stage on a journey, a stage that presents the opportunity for reunification as a positive, loving experience.

In conclusion, through their narratives *Ring* and *Dark Water* can be seen to reinforce the importance of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ ideal that a woman should be willing to give up everything to save her child. Simultaneously the need to display this idealisation reveals a very negative portrayal of single-parent families and working mothers. These films suggest that women who bring up children on their own will never be able to succeed in keeping their offspring safe. However, all is not lost as an entry into a womb-space and the entailing interaction with the spirit allows for these working mothers to rediscover their lost mythical maternity and put their children first again, even if that means sacrificing their own life. Could this rebirth be a symptom of the desire for a mother who cares unconditionally and sates all needs: the mother of the symbiotic union? If these womb-spaces were also considered to be symbolic of the symbiotic union, then would not the idea that the mother also desires to return to the mother-child dyad be an integral part of the phantasy? The womb phantasy is, after all, a desire to be loved.

What is Wrong with the ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’?: Miike Takashi and the Japanese need to *Amaeru*

As demonstrated above, the work of Kitayama can be seen to reveal the relationship between the mother and the spiritual realm in Japanese culture and the psyche of the country’s people. This relationship is portrayed in a long history of folklore and myth, with the popularity of the *kaidan* subgenre in cinema over the last fifteen years being just one permutation of the idea that birth and death are two sides to the same coin, or rather the two translations of the maternal body that are bound in a dialectic. But why is the mother so important to the Japanese psyche? Why does the majority of Japanese psychoanalysis focus on the mother and the maternal, as opposed to the child, the father or the paternal? One potential answer could lie in the work of the psychoanalyst Doi Takeo and his theory of *amae* - the wish to depend on or presume another’s love.

In this section Doi’s work will be used to demonstrate how four films by one of Japan’s most prolific and successful directors, Miike Takashi, critique the Japanese ideals of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ and her ‘salaryman’ husband. Starting with Miike’s own interpretation of the *kaidan* motif, *Chakushin ari* (*One Missed Call*, Miike Takashi, 2003) and his first English language film, the transnational *Imprint* (Miike Takashi, 2006), it will demonstrate how the mother and the maternal are simultaneously represented as loving and deadly. It will then turn to two extreme films by Miike that defy generic labelling, *Ôdishon* (*Audition*, Miike Takashi, 1999) and *Bijitâ Q* (*Visitor Q*, Miike Takashi, 2001), showing how these works stand in contrast to the *kaidan* films of Nakata, as instead of punishing single mothers for being a break from the ideal Japanese family, they seek to reveal the crumbling reality that this ideal may not be as perfect as its façade suggests. I propose that it is through an analysis of the womb symbolism in these works in relation to Doi’s concept of *amae*, that this critique is most clearly revealed.

Having directed 98 productions in the years between 1991 and 2015, Miike has covered everything from horror to musical, *yakuza* crime to adventure comedy, samurai to teen drama. Although *yakuza* (Japanese gangster) narratives stand out as being a source that Miike continually returns to, his reputation as a director-for-hire, willing to work for any studio and under any budget – and on projects that often already have completed scripts and cast attached – positions him as an interesting counterpoint to more traditionally auteur Japanese directors such as Sono Sion, Kurosawa Kiyoshi or Tsukamoto Shinya. As Tom Mes notes in his monograph on the director, Miike is not concerned at all about genre, believing it to be up to others to decide how a film should be categorised.⁵¹ Mes explains how Miike sees himself as an ‘arranger’ of films, rather than their author: “someone who takes existing material written by others and gives that material its final shape”.⁵² The creative freedom he is given in his work means that Miike is able to manipulate this existing material so that it reflects his own distinct style, and therefore has created his own form of auteurship.

Miike’s work has rarely been analysed using psychoanalytic theory, with much scholarship on the director focusing on his position as an auteur, the use of violence in his films, or his connection to the ‘Asia-extreme’ marketing label used in the West. However, I propose that when looking at the broad themes that appear across his vast body of work, certain patterns appear that reveal a clear insight into the changing conception of the family in Japanese society. The overwhelming focus on the relationship between mother and child in Japanese psychoanalytic theory entails that it could provide some much needed insight into this rarely studied area of Miike’s work. Only a small number of his films actually feature a family unit, and instead they more frequently depict isolated loners or outcasts that specifically lack the familial

⁵¹ Tom Mes, *Agitator: The Cinema of Takashi Miike* (Goldamings, Surrey: FAB Press, 2003), 21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 10.

bonds and ancestry deemed so important in traditional Japanese culture. Many of Miike's films show these individuals forming surrogate families – mostly revolving around crime – which then disintegrate through death and destruction, such as *Hyōryūgai* (*The City of Lost Souls*, Miike Takashi, 2000), *Tengoku kara kita otoko tachi* (*The Guys from Paradise*, Miike Takashi, 2001) and *Araburu tamashii tachi* (*Agitator*, Miike Takashi, 2002). But in order to demonstrate the importance of the mother-child bond to Japanese society, and the role of the womb phantasy in that bond and its later societal ramifications, this section will focus on four films by Miike that actually depict biological-familial relationships. I propose that through the combination of Doi's psychoanalytic theory and Miike's films it is revealed how Japanese society as a whole is built upon a womb phantasy.

Doi is Japan's most well-known psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, with his internationally renowned text *Amae no kōzō* (*The Anatomy of Dependence*), first published in 1971, selling almost one-and-a-half million copies by 2003.⁵³ Doi argues that the theory of *amae* is key to understanding the Japanese mind. As John Bester explains in the forward to his English translation of Doi's text:

The Japanese term *amae* refers, initially, to the feelings that all normal infants at the breast harbour toward the mother - dependence, the desire to be passively loved, the unwillingness to be separated from the warm mother-child circle and cast into a world of objective 'reality'.⁵⁴

This emotion is first experienced in the early stages of infancy, when the child is fed and embraced by the mother, enveloped in the symbiotic union. Doi argues that these feelings stay with the child into adult life and play a far greater role in Japanese adulthood than they do in the West. Both men and women can exhibit it in sweet or cute behaviour that plays up to another's kindness. Doi contends that *amae* is an

⁵³ Doi Takeo, *The Anatomy of Dependence* [1971], trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 2001); Hirakawa Sukehiro, 'Foreword,' in *Understanding Amae: The Japanese Concept of Need-love: Collected Papers of Takeo Doi* (Folkestone: Global Orient, 2005), ix.

⁵⁴ John Bester, 'Foreword,' in Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, 7.

emotion or drive that is experienced in the West, but that these countries and their languages lack a definitive term with which to describe it. He believes that in adult life people seek out relationships that allow them to recreate the feeling of goodwill and indulgence that they received from their mothers. For although *amae* is first experienced in early childhood, it is shaped by, and then shapes, interactions with the wider world. Doi argues that in Japan the parent-child relationship is seen as the most perfect, believing that Japanese individual social structures radiate out from each person in circles, from the inner circle containing the parents, to the outer circles of those who are *tanin*, or not blood relatives. With *tanin* the individual's relationship must involve *enryo* (a constraint or holding back). As the child's relationship to those who are not *tanin* shapes their interaction with those who are, Doi's work can be seen to demonstrate how childhood can affect later adult societal and familial interaction.

Doi claimed that he uncovered the importance of *amae* at the very beginning of his investigation into the potential of psychoanalysis in Japan. One popular diagnosis in Japan, first used by the influential psychiatrist Morita Shōma, was *shinkeishitsu* – a mental state that included neurasthenia, anxiety neurosis and obsessive neurosis. Morita argued that these neuroses were bound together in *shinkeishitsu* by the symptom of *toraware*, meaning “‘to be bound or caught’, as by some intense preoccupation”.⁵⁵ Morita believed that *toraware* was related to hypochondriac fear, yet Doi proposed that during therapy this symptom instead turned into hyposensitivity in the relationship between the patient and their doctor, a symptom that he believed was best described by the term *kodawari*. *Kodawari* can be understood as the state of being sensitive about small things, or to be disturbed about personal relationships. As Doi explains:

⁵⁵ Doi Takeo, 'Amae: A Key Concept,' in *Understanding Amae*, 15.

In the state of *kodawari* one feels that he is not accepted by others, which suggests that *kodawari* results from the unsatisfied desire to *amaeru*. This *toraware* can be traced back through *kodawari* to *amae*. In my observations the patient's *toraware* usually receded when he became aware of his *amae* towards the therapist, which he had been warding off consciously and unconsciously up to then.⁵⁶

Doi contends that once his patients had realised their own desire to *amaeru* they were able to recognise that up until that point they had not established a proper sense of self, with the desire to *amaeru* taking up all of their existence. Doi believed that through this recognition of their state of 'no self', they could start the process of gaining a sense of self, beginning their recovery. Therefore the desire to *amaeru*, although present in everyone, can lead to the failure to establish a proper sense of self – in many ways like the failure to break from the symbiotic union – leading to neuroses.

Doi believes that the lack of a word for *amae* in English, or any of the other European languages, points towards an important issue in understanding the difference between Japanese and Western psychic life. Drawing on Balint's work, Doi argues that the psychoanalyst's concept of 'primary love' (also known as passive object love) can be seen as the desire to *amaeru*, yet whereas Balint argued that these wishes were only revealed to the patient after a long period of analysis, Doi contends that for the Japanese the emotion of primary love is consciously accessible through the cultural acceptance of *amae*. Doi believed that this variation is key to understanding the differences between Japanese and Western minds. Balint argued that primary love could only be revealed after extensive analysis due to it being the cause of the earliest form of narcissism – the need to love oneself as one is unsatisfied by another's love – and as such is deeply repressed. However, Doi contends that the Japanese ability to access their original primary love does not mean that they are less

⁵⁶ Doi, 'Amae: A Key Concept,' 15.

narcissistic, rather that they continue this desire to be loved after the formation of early narcissism. Doi concludes that Japanese people experience the frustration of their primary love like Balint argued those in the West do, but that contrary to those cultures the Japanese do not give up the desire for this primary love, through a continuing wish to *amaeru*.

Doi argues that this suggests a form of societal acceptance of *amae* that allows for it not to be repressed. He writes: “in Japanese society parental dependency is fostered, and this behaviour pattern is even institutionalised into its social structure, whereas perhaps the opposite tendency prevails in Western societies.”⁵⁷ For example, it may be exhibited in employer-employee relationships, between friends, or partners. In Japan the mother – the recipient and source of primary love – is also expected to unconditionally love her child throughout their life, and be willing to devote the same level of care that she gave in early childhood. Motherhood in Japan is defined by this unconditional and continuing love. Ohinata Masami explains: “When Japanese hear the word *mother* they do not call to mind the real flesh-and-blood mothers of their personal experience but, rather, see a personification of ‘devotion to children, parental affection, and self-sacrifice’.”⁵⁸ It is this constant referral to a mythical and symbolic maternity that continually links back to the maternal love of the initial stages of life, where child and mother are joined together in symbiosis, and all needs are taken care of and all desires met.

In *kaidan* films such as *Ring* and *Dark Water* a mother’s failure to respond to their child’s *amaeru* and give them the love, attention and devotion they desire, either leads to the child returning from the grave for revenge, or to the neglect of a child so that

⁵⁷ Doi, ‘*Amae: A Key Concept*,’ 18.

⁵⁸ Ohinata Masami, ‘The Mystique of motherhood: A key to Understanding Social Change and Family Problems in Japan,’ in *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past Present and Future*, ed by Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1995), 205.

they become open to a threat. These films, with their female protagonists who eventually rediscover their mythical maternity, can be seen to reinforce the idea that a woman's place is in the home as a 'good wife, wise mother', and are therefore highly problematic from a feminist viewpoint. But not all Japanese films that feature mother-child relationships, or that can be seen to express the desire to *amaeru*, work to reinforce this social paradigm. Miike's films provide an interesting example as the director has produced both a more traditional *kaidan* film, as well as works that overtly counteract the Japanese patriarchal ideals of motherhood.

Miike's take on the *kaidan* motif, *One Missed Call*, has received very little scholarly or critical attention, other than its inclusion in the debates that surround the subgenre and its American remakes.⁵⁹ However, unlike most *kaidan* films, its plot is far from straightforward and features a number of bizarre twists in a suitably Miike-like fashion. As the true perpetrator of violent acts towards the young Nanako is not discovered until the very end of the film, the initial source of horror in *One Missed Call* is that of a mother injuring her own children so that she can then take care of them. As a staff member at the Children's Welfare Centre tells Yumi and Hiroshi, "[a] devoted mother caring for her sick children gains respect, sympathy and praise from people". This version of Kitayama's 'masochistic caretaker' would keep the child in a state of dependency, and suggests that the mother must have needed to carry out this injuring and then caring in order to maintain her own maternal role. Then, after the plot twist is revealed and Mimiko is exposed as the true perpetrator of the injuries her sister sustained, audience sympathy is switched from the children to the mother, who has just realised that one of her daughters is physically abusing the other. Nevertheless, this new sympathy for Marie is also troubled by her abandonment of

⁵⁹ For example see: Wetmore Jr., Kevin J. 'Technoghosts and Culture Shocks,' 72. The American remake of Miike's film was given the same title as its source material's English name and was directed by French director Eric Valette: *One Missed Call* (Eric Valette, 2008).

Mimiko during her asthma attack, as she is still partly to blame for her daughter's death. Subsequently, in *One Missed Call* there is not a clear condemnation of the abandoning mother, but rather a confusion, a blurring of the lines between blame and understanding. During the first half of the film the suggested abuse by Marie perverts the idea of *amae* as the mother is believed to do anything so that she can continue to care for her children, keeping them in the symbiotic fold. When the true source of the physical abuse is revealed the audience can only attempt to look back to try to figure out the answer to why Mimiko acts this way.

One Missed Call leaves many fundamental questions such as this unanswered. Following on from the punishment of single-mothers in Nataka's films, Mimiko and Nanako's lack of a father could be seen as a potential source of her anger and violence. Whilst in a coma after his stabbing, Hiroshi dreams of saving Mimiko's life by administering her asthma inhaler after her mother has left for the hospital. By saving her life in this fantasy sequence, Hiroshi is positioned in the role of heroic father for Mimiko, destined to enter into a relationship with her where she will care for him the only way that she knows how. Simultaneously, it is not clear whether Mimiko's curse was created by the malevolent nature she possessed whilst living, or whether her mother's abandonment of her, leading to her death, is more to blame. Miike's skill as a director lies in his ability to make the audiences of his films question their assumptions, to shift their identifications and understanding of the characters mid-story, and to create a world of chaos where certainty is impossible.



Figure 5.12: Miike references *Dark Water* in *One Missed Call*

Further to this, Miike appears to quote other contemporary *kaidan* works. Marie and her daughters' apartment is damp and looks imposing from the outside; shot in a similar extreme low angle to the apartment in Nakata's *Dark Water*, allowing for its water tower to grab the attention of the viewer. It also features a curse that is spread through a technological gadget, much like Sadako's video in *Ring*. Aside from the mother-daughter relationship featured in the narrative, *One Missed Call*, like other contemporary *kaidan* films, is littered with symbolic womb and maternal imagery. During the hospital scene when Yumi and Hiroshi discover Marie's corpse the ghost of Mimiko pushes jars containing human fetuses out of doorways into Yumi's path. Cupboards are also used as sites for Mimiko's hauntings, Yumi has a shower directly before her final encounter with the girl – the water allowing Mimiko to be reborn through her possession of Yumi's body – and Marie's dead body is found curled up inside a box.

Even though *One Missed Call* shares many of the conventions of the contemporary *kaidan* film, it differs in a number of key aspects. Critically it is the daughter that is abusive, not the mother, and although in Yumi's child psychology class they discuss the supposition so often used in the subgenre that those who are abused or neglected go on to repeat this abuse with their own children, Mimiko was not actually abused by her own mother. Her actions were of her own accord, and although her mother did

leave her when she was having the asthma attack that took her life, it was only because Marie had just realised the extent of Mimiko's violent behaviour and was taking Nanako to the hospital. Therefore Marie's liability for Mimiko's death is not as clear-cut as in other *kaidan* films. Also, Yumi appears to have been able to break her own cycle of abuse by analysing it at university, and although she is still haunted by her mother's actions, in the hospital scene she is able to forgive her.

One Missed Call is one of the very small number of Miike's films that features a female protagonist. In an interview with Patrick Macias the director comments: "The problem with women in films is that they tend to bring with them a lot of logic, which requires reason and motivation. Too many logical things will destroy my films."⁶⁰ The women in Miike's films are often cast in supporting roles or as part of a group cast such as in the family narratives of *Katakuri-ke no kôfuku* (*The Happiness of the Katakuris*, Miike Takashi, 2001) and *Visitor Q*.⁶¹ Rarely, although still more commonly than the female protagonist, Miike's films contain female antagonists who go through a process of transformation. Either the films' plots reveal some vital piece of information about a female character mid-way through the film that abruptly shifts the audiences' conception of her, or she goes through a process of transformation herself that is followed step by step. *One Missed Call* falls into the former category, as initially the audience is led to believe that it is Marie who is the source of the evil curse, and her children the innocent victims, before it is revealed that the malevolent force is actually Mimiko. Miike's 2006 film *Imprint* also features such an abrupt shift. Produced for the American television series 'Masters of Horror', *Imprint* has received

⁶⁰ Patrick Macias, *TokyoScope: The Japanese Cult Film Companion* (San Francisco: Cadence Books, 2001), 220.

⁶¹ An exception to this would be Miike's television series *Tennen Shôjo Mann* (Miike Takashi, 1999) and its sequel *Tennen shôjo Man next: Yokohama hyaku-ya hen* (Miike Takashi, 1999) which feature casts of predominantly young girls.

very little critical attention, yet it still has an infamous reputation for being the only film in the collection to be banned from American television broadcast.

Imprint is pervaded by the horror of the female womb and the link between maternity and death. In the opening scene where Christopher is approaching the brothel in a boat, the body of a dead pregnant woman floats towards them in the water. She has chosen to die rather than bring up her child in these inhospitable surroundings. The link also dominates the scarred prostitute's own upbringing. In the second, and supposedly truthful, version of her childhood, the prostitute tells Christopher of her mother's work of aborting unborn children, and her own task of discarding the bloody fetuses into the river. Like the pregnant prostitutes who are thrown into the water after committing suicide, the bodies of the unborn babies transform the water from being a source of life into a burial ground. This idea of motherhood – and more specifically the womb – as equalling death is heightened even more when during her recollection of her childhood the prostitute explains to Christopher “that hole is the one that leads to hell” in a voiceover is spoken over an image of the young girl watching her mother remove a fetus from a screaming woman's genitals. Later it is revealed that every time her mother aborts and destroys a fetus, she places a paper windmill on the banks of the river. These spinning shapes call to mind a mother's role in the circle of life, as discussed earlier in this chapter, but here their bright colours and common use as a child's toy position them as uncanny memorials to the unwanted children.

The womb and the cycle of life are recalled again in the final scene of the film. A now crazed Christopher lies in a damp and dark prison cell positioned at the end of the long corridor, after shooting the scarred prostitute. Two guards deliver him food and water into a wooden bucket that resembles the same vessel that the young

prostitute used to dump the aborted fetuses into the river. As the decrepit man moves over to eat and drink he sees the bloody body of a baby in the bucket. Christopher smiles as he grasps the bucket tightly to his stomach, embracing it as he rocks from side to side, singing a lullaby. As the film cuts from a close-up of the now obviously deranged Christopher to a long shot of the cell, where the figures of Komomo and a young girl stand beside him, radiantly lit in the dark room. The young girl is Christopher's sister, whom he killed as a child. Throughout the latter part of the film there is a growing suggestion that the man's persistent search for, and love of, the naïve and innocent Komomo is due to displaced guilt over his killing of his sister. Komomo therefore, is a reincarnation of his sibling, a rebirth symbolised by the prostitute's blowing of a paper windmill that she holds in her hands.



Figures 5.13 and 5.14: An insane Christopher sees an aborted foetus in his water bucket in *Imprint*

When taking into account the rest of Miike's body of work there is one other film that uses womb imagery to engage with the position of the maternal in Japanese culture, *Audition*. The film shares many similarities with *Imprint*, a fact that should hardly be surprising given the production context of the latter that undoubtedly was partly due to the success of its predecessor. However, unlike *Imprint*, which turns towards the supernatural and monstrous to scare the audience, *Audition* uses the uncanny, and specifically the womb and the presence of *amae* in the marital relationship, to critique Japanese social structures in a terrifying manner.

Audition is a tale about two people searching for companionship in a country where relationships between men and women are changing. Aoyama is looking for the perfect ‘good wife, wise mother’, a traditional and obedient woman that will provide company and service rather than romance and passion. Throughout the film the audience is constantly presented with the idea that men need women to assist them, with the emphasis being on the idea of domestic service above economic support. This is clearly represented in a scene at the beginning of the film when Aoyama and his friend Yoshikawa go to a bar for a drink. Dressed as traditional ‘salarymen’ in suits, the two men discuss the difficulties of operating a business during the recession. Their conversation is interrupted by the raucous laughter of a table of women behind them. As the pair look disdainfully down from their stools Yoshikawa laments “Awful girls, common, full of themselves... and stupid, all of them. Where are the nice ones? Japan is finished”. It is at this point that Aoyama informs his friend of his desire to get married. The manner in which they talk about marriage is as though it is a rational and logical arrangement of care. Aoyama wants someone to look after him, rather than to fall in love. As they discuss his potential bride it becomes clear that Aoyama desires a traditional ‘good wife, wise mother’. He states that he would like her to be a career women (although obviously this career would be given up after marriage) and that she should have some accomplishments, such as to be able to play the piano or sing. “Properly trained people are confident,” states Aoyama, “people who lack confidence depend on others, and can’t find happiness”. His statement is unconsciously ironic, considering that he is looking for a woman that he can depend *on*, someone to cook and clean for him, and care for the household whilst he is out at work.⁶²

⁶² There are many other instances throughout the film where the role of a wife is seen as a duty or

To use the German expression that captured Freud's imagination, Aoyama is looking for the perfect *heimlich* wife. He desires a traditional and obedient woman who will provide company and service rather than romance and passion. When out on their dates Asami is shy, polite and grateful, possessing many of the mental, as well as physical, attributes of the traditional model Japanese woman. Mes and Jasper Sharp write in their compendium *The Midnight Eye Guide to New Japanese Film*: "Eyes permanently cast downward, her voice a barely audible mew, slim, gentle and elegant, [Asami] is the very essence of demure compliance, a paragon of the Japanese ideal of femininity."⁶³ However, she is also *heimlich* in the other sense of the word. She holds a secret desire for revenge and the need for total attention and devotion. She wants Aoyama to love her and no-one else, and is willing to go to any length to achieve this union. She is not demanding that he simply stays faithful, but that he relinquish any emotional attachments to other people such as his son or dead wife. She requires the total dependence and adoration that can only truly exist between mother and child, intending to restore upon him the vulnerability of an infant so that she may provide all that he needs. She is the *heimlich/unheimlich* mother, seemingly perfect, but actually distorted and cruel.

Asami's disappearance after she has sex with Aoyama is a turning point in the narrative. The coastal location of the hotel, combined with a shot of Asami looking out over the water before they make love suggests the idea of rebirth, but this is not a positive opportunity for a second chance at life. The consummation of their relationship marks Aoyama's birth into Asami's madness, the act of penetration symbolically introducing him to her uncanny maternity. Also – as discussed in

service rather than a romantic and equal companion. When looking at the application for the audition Aoyama compares it to the difficulty of trying to choose his first car, and later on his housekeeper says to Shigekiko that if a man doesn't have a woman to support him he will exhaust himself.

⁶³ Tom Mes and Jasper Sharp, *The Midnight Eye Guide to New Japanese Film* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2005), 194.

relation to the *kaidan* films – the sea suggests the supernatural, and from this point on confusion now reigns as it becomes unclear whether what follows is reality or part of Aoyama’s increasingly disturbed imagination. After searching for his missing partner he eventually returns home where Asami is waiting for him. He drinks whisky that she has spiked with drugs and collapses to the floor. The film then depicts Aoyama’s dream world, where his dates with Asami are replayed, but this time she appears to be telling the truth about her past. Following this, he finds himself in her apartment, and his attention is drawn to a large brown sack lying on the floor. Inside this exterior womb is an alive but grossly mutilated man. In the background are the sounds of Asami retching. She regurgitates her food and then feeds it to the man like a bird feeding her young. This shocking image forces Aoyama back to reality, only he wakes up to discover that he has been paralysed by Asami. She proceeds to lay him onto another of her womb-like sacks and begins to torture him, piercing his skin with long needles, focusing on the stomach and eyes. She reprimands him for holding auditions so that he may take advantage of women, and speaks of her distress that he is unable to reject all others and love only her.



Figure 5.15: Asami’s exterior womb in *Audition*

There is disagreement in the scholarly field that surrounds Miike’s work as to whether the horrific events that follow the consummation of Aoyama and Asami’s relationship are real, or just part of Aoyama’s guilt-driven imagination. In *Agitator*,

Mes reads the film's final act of torture as a real event, but one that is confused in Aoyama's drugged mind.⁶⁴ Robert Hyland, however, critiques Mes for this view, arguing: "to read Asami's violence as 'real' denies the film's political agenda".⁶⁵ Hyland contends that instead of Asami's acts being carried out in revenge against Aoyama and his patriarchal ill-treatment and dismissal of women, they are in fact symptoms of his guilt over cheating on his dead wife by loving Asami. He explains: "The film suggests that it is the guilt feelings derived from his own behavior (as well as patriarchy's abuses) which causes [Aoyama] to project his anxieties upon Asami and consequently construct her as a monstrous other."⁶⁶ Hyland argues that the film can be read as a feminist allegory as it critiques the patriarchal fear of, and simultaneous attraction to, the monstrous feminine, and therefore views this representation of women as deadly and dangerous as nothing more than a man-made construction.

However, when taking into account other works by Miike it is far more likely that the director specifically constructed the film so that the audience would not be totally sure whether its last act was real or just a guilt-ridden fantasy, adding to the uncanny air of the film. The director is very adept in creating this unnerving feeling. For example a small number of scenes in the film are portrayed twice, first in 'real life' and then again in Aoyama's hallucination sequence. Like the scarred prostitute's variations in her life story in *Imprint*, Asami first tells Aoyama about her childhood in a café whilst out on their second date. It is in this scene, prior to Aoyama being drugged, where the film's formal style begins to distort the audience's perception of the events. As Asami starts to tell Aoyama about her normal family life and her job in

⁶⁴ Mes, *Agitator*, 181-191.

⁶⁵ Robert Hyland, 'A Politics of Excess, Violence and Violation un Miike Takashi's Audition,' in *Horror to the Extreme*, 205.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

a bar there are two very slight jump cuts in the editing that are nearly imperceptible, slightly distorting the depiction of Aoyama in medium close-up shots. Then suddenly as the editing moves from a standard shot/reverse shot pattern to a long shot, it is revealed that the café has suddenly emptied of all its other customers, and even though the busy traffic on the street seen out of the window has disappeared, the noise of it still remains. The shot composition means that a glass partition is in front of Aoyama, appearing to conceal him within a glass box. It is as though from this point on he is trapped into a course of action from which he cannot escape. The film then uses a shock cut to move mid-sentence from the bright café to a dark restaurant with black and red décor (also moving from a long-shot to Aoyama's point-of-view, with Asami looking straight at the camera). As she chats about her love of dancing, the parallel lines of a set of banisters behind her and the red angular decorations on a table cloth foreshadow the two burn lines that the audience will later see on Asami's thigh, caused by the hot incense sticks that her stepfather used to burn her with during her dance lessons. The scene is then shot from a high angle looking down at the couple from above, showing that these parallel lines surround the couple through the floor tiles, the wall panels and even a piano, with its wires playing a large part in the later hallucination and torture scenes. The image not only foreshadows what is about to come, but gives an air of inescapability to it; Aoyama and Asami are trapped by her history. Even though Aoyama has yet to be drugged, Miike's use of a variety of editing techniques, combined with imaginative shot composition and use of diegetic sound entail that these uncanny scenes start to express a growing sense of unease and confusion. That this starts prior to his consumption of the drug also bestows Asami with an air of the supernatural, which combined with her traditional white dress and long dark hair, makes her reminiscent of the avenging ghosts of the *kaidan*.

Whether the film is allegorical or not does not alter certain messages about the links between maternity and death, the power of womb symbolism and the need to *amaeru* – to depend on another’s goodwill or love. These psychoanalytic concepts can all be read into Asami’s brown sack and its human contents. Like the mythical tales of marriage between a man and a creature in Kitayama’s work, the relationship that Aoyama is looking for with Asami is more like that between a mother and child than Western ideas of romantic love. He wants someone that he can *amaeru* too, someone whom he can depend on and who will love him unconditionally. In a bizarre twist on this patriarchal desire, Asami wishes also to give him just that, but fulfilled to such an extent that it is perverted. She will love him unconditionally, but only if he agrees to love her – and only her – unconditionally too. She wants to make him totally dependent on her, and due to his refusal to give up his son and the memory of his wife, she attempts to *make* him dependent on her by symbolically castrating him through the cutting off of his feet. Asami returns the men in her ‘care’ back to the child-like state of dependence of primary love. By cutting out their tongues and removing their limbs they are unable to walk or talk, and she feeds them like a mother-bird feeds her young. However, there is the suggestion that the man contained within her exterior womb already is actually happy with his position rather than wanting to escape. He laps up the food she has regurgitated for him, and allows himself to be petted like a dog. He has got what he – or rather men – want, a mother substitute that allows for him to return to the womb so that he can be totally dependent on her. Asami’s bag is the perfect depiction of a distinctly Japanese womb phantasy.



Figure 5.16: Asami performs the role of loving mother in *Audition*

There is one more work by Miike that should be discussed in relation to the maternal womb and the desire to *amaeru*. In his 2001 film *Visitor Q* Miike demonstrates his ability to shock, amuse and disgust in a bizarre narrative that centres on the reformation of a broken family unit. In a perversely comedic fashion, the reuniting of disgraced journalist Kiyoshi's family involves murder, necrophilia, lactation and symbolic castration. In his essay on *Visitor Q*, Thomas R. Britt argues that "Miike uses a disintegrating household to indict a Japan that is in dangerous flux and in need of an apocalyptic restoration."⁶⁷ Importantly for this thesis, this restoration is completed through the figure of the mother, with Keiko's rediscovery of her maternity. Instead of supporting the traditional figures of the 'good wife, wise mother' and her 'salaryman' husband, *Visitor Q* can be seen to directly critique the manner in which these ideals have damaged Japanese family life. At the start of the film Keiko is a pathetic figure, but strangely one who also embodies the Japanese ideal mother as she is willing to submit to anything that her son enforces upon her. She continues to love and care for him even though he is physically abusive. Due to Takuya's destructive and violent behaviour the family home is messy and in a state of disrepair, as though his parents have become so used to his behaviour that they have stopped trying to hide it. The only tidy room is the boy's bedroom, with its

⁶⁷ Thomas R. Britt, 'Lower Depths and Higher Aims: Death, Excess and Discontinuity in *Irreversible* and *Visitor Q*,' *Cinephile* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 12.

immaculately organised cupboard in which he keeps the varying objects that he uses to beat his mother.

The Jungian psychoanalyst Kawai Hayao conducted a study in Japan in the 1980s into the rising levels of violence in the home carried out by children upon their parents. He discovered that mothers were the victims of the violence 61.3% of the time, whilst fathers only 15.9%.⁶⁸ However, even though these statistics are insightful, what could be considered more revealing is the psychoanalyst's own misogynistic view of motherhood, which reflects certain patriarchal beliefs held in Japan. Kawai argues that whereas Europe and the United States follow what he calls the 'paternal principle', Japan adheres to the 'maternal principle'. He proposes that the maternal principle is one of containment, declaring: "as long as a child is his mother's child everything he does is permitted and forgiven."⁶⁹ The paternal principle on the other hand is one of separation. It is strict in its discipline and divisions (good, bad, top, bottom etc.). Kawai argues: "What is important here is that in the case of the father judgments concerning right and wrong take precedence and clear standards come into being, but in the case of the mother what comes first is the feeling that this is 'my child'."⁷⁰ Kawai argues that in pre-war Japan the maternal principle was levelled out by the strong presence of the father in the family set-up. He argues that the increased freedom and rights for women gained since the Second World War has pushed Japan into a troubled "reign of an unrestricted maternal principle".⁷¹ Consequently, he proposes that the violent acts of the child are an attempt to break

⁶⁸ Kawai Hayao, 'Violence in the Home: Conflict Between Two Principles – Maternal and Paternal,' in *Japanese Culture and Behaviour: Selected Readings*, ed. William P. Lebra (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 298.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 299.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 300.

free from the mother's all-encompassing hold and gain independence. Kawai concludes by stating that:

Those children who revolt are unconsciously feeling the need for a father. By appealing to 'strength' in the form of brute force, these children would appear to be trying to reinject 'strength' and 'strictness' into a home overly dominated by the mother. This 'strength' however is not to be found only in the physical force of the father. The function should originate in the masculine strengths of thinking and judgment.⁷²

Kawai's sexist argument lays the blame for the beating of these mothers, and the misbehaviour of children in general, squarely at the feet of Japanese women, failing to recognise that it is the Japanese patriarchal ideal of the all-forgiving and unconditionally loving mother that could be seen to be behind his theory of the 'maternal principle'. These women are encouraged – if not expected – to behave as such, but then simultaneously blamed for the effect that this has on their children.

At the beginning of *Visitor Q* Miike appears to be agreeing with Kawai's argument that the unconstrained maternal principle of acceptance results in childhood violence and destruction, yet as the film develops it is instead this misconception of the maternal that the director critiques. In order to re-establish her family unit Keiko must first rediscover her real maternity, shedding the façade of the 'masochistic caretaker' – to use Kitayama's term – forced on her by society. When Q first enters the household he calmly sits and eats dinner with Kiyoshi whilst Takuya hits his mother, even telling the boy to continue his beating at one point after he has requested more rice from her. Later that evening Keiko is forced to undress her husband as he sleeps in bed – again reinforcing the idea of traditional marriage as a mother-son relationship – and is able to tell that her husband has had sex with someone else. The next day after she has had S&M sex with a client and brought drugs she sits in her absent daughter's bedroom. Q joins her in the room, hugs her, and then removes her top,

⁷² Kawai, 'Violence in the Home,' 305 – 306.

beginning to massage her breasts. Through stimulating her nipples Q manages to get her to lactate, her spraying milk splashing against a photo of her daughter. This seemingly impossible act symbolises Keiko's return to maternity, and she is transformed into a different woman. She is now brave, happy, and willing to help her husband undertake any act with a comically cheerful disposition. Her new-found spirit also allows her oppose her son's violent behaviour. Takuya witnessed Q's stimulation of his mother's breasts and her production of milk, looking on almost jealously at the act. That evening he goes to attack her once more, trying to take out his frustrated anger on her. However her new-found maternal confidence allows her to fight back. She refuses to submit to his attack, grabbing a knife and a cucumber from the kitchen and proceeding to slice the phallic vegetable in the air right before his eyes, before throwing the knife directly at him.



Figures 5.17 and 5.18: Keiko rediscovers her maternity and Takuya's womb-like cupboard in *Visitor Q*

The joy of rediscovering her maternity has given Keiko new strength and happiness, encouraging her to put a stop to her son's beatings and seizing back her parental power through a literal threat of castration. Her new maternal confidence contradicts Kawai's arguments by actually putting a stop to her son's violent actions. The relationship between son and mother has definite Oedipal overtones. In one scene the son is shown curled up in a foetal position inside the cupboard where he keeps his special whips for beating his mother. His entrance into this intra-uterine space, complete with his own phallic objects, could suggest – in a Freudian interpretation of

the womb phantasy – a desire to return to the womb in order to have sex with his mother. However *Visitor Q* also appears to display the proliferation of Kosawa's Ajase complex in Japan over Oedipal theory. Anne Allison draws out four major differences between the Oedipus and Ajase complexes. She argues that in the Oedipal narrative the mother is passive, whilst the Ajasean maternal figure is active. Alternatively, the father is active in the Oedipus model as a figure of fear and death, whilst he is ineffective and insignificant in the Ajase complex. The Oedipus complex is set up around violence, whilst the Ajase complex focuses on guilt and forgiveness, and finally the Oedipal boy must separate from his parents to become an individual when the Ajasean son remains in contact with his parents and gains a new level of respect for them.



Figure 5.19: Returning to the womb and the maternal embrace in *Visitor Q*

Subsequently Takuya's sadistic actions towards his mother could be interpreted as an outward sign of the repression of his sexual desire in an Oedipal context, and the testing of her love in an Ajasean one. The son sees his cupboard, and therefore the womb, as a place of safety and security, the symbol of a happy relationship with his mother. This idea appears again at the end of the film. In the final scene the daughter returns home after receiving a visit from Q. She enters her bedroom and picks up a teddy bear, an action that metaphorically signifies her return to childhood. Looking out the window she sees her mother sitting naked wrapped in a large blue tarpaulin. In

the folds of this womb-like enclosure huddles her father, suckling at his wife's breast. In a manner that displays Kosawa's Ajase complex the daughter forgives her parents and goes out to join the family unit, re-entering into her mother's womb and re-establishing their bond. By allowing for her family to feed from her Keiko responds positively and actively to their dependence; she is a loving caregiver who allows them to *amaeru*, but on her own terms.

Conclusion

Key to Doi's theory of *amae*, and a factor that makes his concept an integral conceptual component of this thesis, is his proposition children can only being to *amaeru* once they have started to comprehend themselves as a separate entity to their mothers:

In other words, until it starts to *amaeru* the infant's mental life is an extension, as it were, of its life in the womb, and the mother and child are still unseparated. However, as its mind develops it gradually realizes that itself and its mother are independent existences, and comes to feel the mother as something indispensable to itself; it is the craving for close contact thus developed that constitutes, one might say, *amae*.⁷³

Amae is the critical marker that signifies the beginning of the individual psyche, the point at which the child has moved from a womb delusion with no sense of self independent to the symbiotic relationship with the mother, to a womb phantasy. To paraphrase Doi, the child now craves the womb-like symbiotic relationship with the mother and wishes (at first) to perpetuate it. Doi continues:

Now if, as I have stated, the prototype of *amae* is the infant's desire to be close to its mother, who, it has vaguely come to realize, is a separate existence from itself, then one may perhaps describe *amae* as, ultimately, an attempt psychologically to deny the fact of separation from the mother... *amae* psychology works to foster a sense of oneness between mother and child. In this sense, the *amae* mentality could be defined as the

⁷³ Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, 74.

attempt to deny the fact of separation that is such an inseparable part of human existence and to obliterate the pain of separation.⁷⁴

I propose that the proliferation of womb imagery and mother-child narratives in the films analysed in this chapter represents an attempt to work through this separation. In these works the womb is symbolically positioned as an emblem of the transience of life, but also as a gateway allowing for a return from the afterlife. The *kaidan* films discussed, through their assertion of traditional values, allow for an activation or experience of the desire to return to the symbiotic union via narratives that depict a reunification between mother and child through an entry into a mythical womb space. The single-mothers in these works are also figures weighed down heavily with blame and guilt, responsible for endangering the lives of their own children. The only way that they are able to achieve the romanticised mythical maternity of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ is through extreme self-sacrifice: a perverse and masochistic punishment for their own previous ‘selfish’ behaviour.

Nevertheless, there are works that critique this idealised form of self-sacrificing maternity by revealing the perversity of a society where a woman is expected to accept any behaviour from her child – and also her husband – with love and forgiveness. *Audition* and *Visitor Q* display a clear critique of the ideals of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ and her ‘salaryman’ husband. They expose the perversity of the cultural trait of expecting women to give up everything, even their own individualism, in order to care for those in their families. Although the desire to return to the symbiotic union is one that can be seen in every country studied in this thesis, and in many cases it is one that needs to be acknowledged to accredit women with the important role they play in society and the formation of identity, these films show that it should not be at the expense of the woman herself.

⁷⁴ Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, 74.

Conclusion

This thesis was inspired by the image of the mute and mutilated man bound in Asami's sack in Miike Takashi's *Audition*. Veiled from the world like Freud's Wolf-Man, this animalistic character is no prisoner. He does not try to escape, beckoning Asami over with one of his remaining fingers so that he can consume his regurgitated food with gusto. The milky substance dribbles down his chin as he laps it up, only pausing slightly to look up at her and smile. As the camera cuts from a medium close-up of the man to encompass his whole form, the character of Asami has transformed into her as a young girl. Patting the man on the head like a pet she turns to Aoyama and says: "you'll love only me won't you, no one else". More of a statement than a question, Asami's words demand total submission. She is delivering what Aoyama set out to acquire, a woman who can replace his mother, willing to sacrifice her own wants and needs in order to care for him. It is everything he has wanted, and as the film has suggested throughout, what all men and women want: a return to the symbiotic union. His womb phantasy is laid out at his feet. It is "the return of the repressed", or to paraphrase Freud's use of Shelling, everything that was once hidden, has now come to light.

Throughout this thesis I have sought to display the frequency with which such a desire occurs across international horror and extreme cinema. Using a cross-cultural psychoanalytic approach I have explored the consistencies and variations in such representations, questioning why and how this desire appears in select films from the East and the West. In contrast to existing scholarship on the maternal in horror cinema, I do not believe that the womb is represented as horrifying *per se*, and have instead demonstrated that the reason why the maternal reproductive genitals are at times represented as monstrous is due to the patriarchal need to reject the love for the

mother in order to perpetuate the status quo. I have explored how these negative representations are often presented alongside symbols or themes that I believe are symptoms revealing the repressed love for the mother, and the desire to return to the symbiotic union.

Chapter 1 took as its focus Freud's denial of the desire to return to the symbiotic union. I proposed that his attempts to continually shore up the Oedipus complex entailed that he dismissed womb phantasies as another example of incestuous sexual desire. Through a detailed analysis of the position of the womb and the womb phantasy in his work I was able to present a case that the maternal reproductive body actually holds far greater significance in Freudian theory than Freud himself would admit, through its position in the subtext and symbolism of his words. This critical engagement with Freudian theory supported the proposition that the true latent content of the womb phantasy is the wish to return to the symbiotic union with the mother, a wish repressed due to Freud's own phallocentrism.

Chapter 2 presented a direct critique of Freudian phallocentrism through an analysis of the patriarchal construction of femininity using the work of Luce Irigaray and Catherine Breillat. Emphasising the need to fully explore the role of the maternal womb in patriarchal society, Breillat's films were used to challenge Freud's passive female body, reasserting the need for woman to be seen as point of origin. A critical engagement with the work of Julia Kristeva was then carried out, challenging her continuation of the maternal binary that Freud used to subdue the force of the maternal, and her proposition that the mother must accept her abject nature and push her child away from her. This section proposed that the figure of the pregnant protagonist in French horror cinema could actually be seen to carry out a similar interrogation from within, as was seen in the work of Breillat and Irigaray, by

embracing her own abjectivity and realigning it with her mythical love for her child. This chapter then turned to the work of Didier Anzieu to provide a reading of the mother-child bond away from the phallocentrism of Freudian theory that can only ever see the female body as lacking, passive and monstrous. Anzieu's theory revelled the potential for the womb phantasy to be considered away from phallocentrism and as the original phantasy of human life.

Chapter 3 continued this discussion of the primacy of the womb phantasy through the work of Margaret Mahler, Klaus Angel and Nancy Chodorow. Using the misogynistic representations of the symbiotic union present in the monstrous mothers of modern American horror cinema, this chapter opened with a discussion of why the mother-child bond was presented as pathologic in these family-centred horror films. It then moved on the haunted house films of the 1970s and 1980s arguing that although on the surface these works may appear more progressive due to the appearance of the mother-hero, an analysis of the womb symbolism contained within them reveals that they are still stories of the monstrosity of the symbiotic union. This chapter then turned to the retro-occult films of the 2010s – contemporary reinterpretations of the haunted house films discussed previously – proposing that these films do show some scope for a more positive and empowering image of the mother.

Whereas Chapter 3 discussed mothers and their children bound in perverse symbiotic unions, Chapter 4 studied what happens when the initial period of symbiosis is cut short. It proposed that the Confucian-influenced belief in Korea that life begins at conception and not birth, and that a mother's bond with her child starts whilst it is still in-utero, makes the acts of abortion and infanticide an important topic. Through the analysis of three family horror films featuring the death of an unborn foetus, this chapter highlighted the importance of *mo-jeong* and *hyao* to the Korean

psyche. Using the research of Chung and Cho it proposed that family connections, specifically *mo-jeong* – the bond between mother and child – form the basis of the country's society. My analysis of these films proposed that the veneration of motherhood found in Korea entails that when non-mothers (women who have been denied the chance to mother) commit monstrous acts their behaviour is partly forgiven, if not expected. The second half of this chapter then carried out a detailed case study of one of the most successful Korean horror films of all time, *A Tale of Two Sisters*. Whilst paying attention to the cultural specifics in the symbolism and narrative features of this film, *A Tale of Two Sisters* can be seen to reveal the truly international aspects to the womb phantasy; those symbols and connotations that are seen in both Eastern and Western cultural products.

Chapter 5 explored further the connection between the womb and the spiritual that was highlighted in Chapter 4. First the films of Nakata Hideo were used to demonstrate how the womb is positioned in Japanese culture as a liminal space between life and death. Utilising Kitayama's theory of transience, this section explored the relationship between the mother and the spiritual in Japanese horror cinema, whilst also highlighting the subjugation of women in society who do not conform to the stereotype of the self-sacrificing 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'. Then, using the work of Miike Takashi a direct critique of the idolisation of the mother was presented. Key to this analysis was Doi Takeo's theory of *amae*, the wish to depend on another's good will. This chapter read Doi's theory of *amae* as a Japanese manifestation of the womb phantasy, as it is the desire to be able to depend on another person in the same manner that the mother could be depended on. Therefore Doi's theory could be read as demonstrating how the womb phantasy can be seen to operate in culturally specific variations, yet still with the original desire to recreate the

symbiotic union at its heart. As with Anzieu and Mahler, *amae* is instigated with the realisation that the mother is *other*, with Doi contending that this fact of separation leaves a lasting legacy on the human condition.

Throughout the horror and extreme films studied in this thesis, failing to detach from the mother-child dyad is often represented as leading to pathological behaviour, and the mother who encourages such a relationship is depicted as monstrous. Instead of being the site of the origin of life, the maternal body is presented as having uncanny links to death and the afterlife; it is seen as an uncontrollable and abject force. However, counter to existing scholarship on these films, I have demonstrated how these messages are frequently contradicted by womb symbolism that recalls the experience of safety and love felt in the early mother-child symbiotic period. A pattern that has emerged across the films analysed is that the exploration of the love for the mother and the desire to return to her embrace has become more explicit in the twenty-first century, and that in both the East and West, films more readily engage with positive representations of motherhood or critique the patriarchal misogyny ingrained in society. Therefore continuing this investigation into the womb phantasy as being symbolic of the symbiotic union could provide fertile ground for further feminist interrogations of patriarchal society.

The cross-cultural methodology of this thesis has allowed for a direct comparison of films from Eastern and Western nations, revealing how womb symbolism is used on an international scale. At a period of increasing transnationalism in cinema and society, this thesis has attempted to bring together the interplay of cross-cultural influences with local historic tradition and societal factors, to trace the consistency of the womb phantasy across the world. Whilst narratives, characters and cinematic form may differ, the desire to return to the symbiotic union appears to be symbolically akin

throughout. By using psychoanalytic theory native to each country studied, this thesis has been able to provide an original and informed contribution into debates on horror and extreme cinema, reinvigorating the study of the unconscious and “the return of the repressed” in these popular forms of filmmaking. What has been revealed is the similarities in repressed content across the world, and importantly, how the symbiotic union between mother and child is not only integral to the formation of the psyche, but also can in some cases be seen to form the basis for society itself (even though patriarchy seeks to deny this). At various points in each chapter attention was paid to the cultural context of a film’s production. I believe that this is highly important as it counters the universalism that can exist in psychoanalytic theory, whilst showing how cinema plays out the concerns and desires of specific social groups.

Key to this thesis has been a critical engagement with Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory. As proposed in Chapter 1, if Freud’s need to prove the Oedipal master narrative and his inherent phallocentrism are removed from the womb phantasy, it can be regarded not as a desire to enter the actual womb of the mother for incestuous sexual satisfaction, but instead to return to the mother-child symbiotic union. The womb phantasy is not simply a regression into childhood, but a celebration of maternal love. It is not the desire to return to an earlier age, but rather to re-enact a time where one felt (or retroactively believed to have felt) truly loved, safe and cared for, without a worry in the world. Ultimately, this presents a challenge to any male-led society, as the one that offers what is desired and celebrated, is a woman. I have shown how throughout international horror and extreme cinema there are numerous examples that support this shift in considering the womb phantasy to be about the symbiotic union. However, it would be incorrect, and indeed falling prey to many of the critiques originally levelled at psychoanalytic film criticism, to propose that every

horror film containing a maternal element allowed for a surface reading of motherly monstrosity and a subtext of the womb phantasy. Instead, what I have sought to reveal across this thesis are the variations of the role of the womb in horror and extreme cinema. It is not just a thing of horror, or incestuous love, but has many different and sometimes opposing symbolic functions. It can be symbolic of a place of safety but also of confinement, a border between immaturity and adulthood, dependence and independence. It can be a symbolic portal to the spiritual realm allowing for a reconnection with lost loved ones, or an access point for malevolent spirits to enter into the everyday world and wreak havoc. Finally it can represent the desire to be reunited with the loving mother, or a fear of being devoured by her.

As with any psychoanalytic study, there were a number of challenges that were encountered due to this approach. A potential issue is that such psychoanalytic film analysis makes claims about the unconscious intentions of the director or screenwriter without that person undergoing the full process of analysis that would confirm such assertions. To counter this, this thesis has looked for the constancies and variations in narratives, themes and symbolism that are presented, enabling a consideration of how these work to support or develop an argument on a wider, cultural scale. Further to this, because patriarchal law is so ingrained into the cultures that I have studied (whether the roots of that law were in Christianity, Judaism, Confucianism or secularism), it can be difficult to distinguish between a psychic process or experience that occurs before, or outside of, such influences, and those which fall under their sway. However, I propose that this is also why the womb phantasy presents a valuable opportunity for a feminist critique, as it is a psychoanalytic concept that can challenge the phallogocentric and heterosexist nature of Freud's work. As the infant has no knowledge of the society into which it has been born and instead only understands

basic emotions and sensations, it has no concept of gender, sexuality or race, and is in a developmental process that proceeds along roughly the same lines for the first few months regardless of its location. Therefore, even when cultural variations are taken into account, when it comes to the symbolisation of the womb phantasy the pre-linguistic origins of the symbiotic union enable it to be understood across the world.

It was also highly important to avoid falling prey to the mother-worship and mythicising of the maternal that patriarchy seeks to perpetuate. The mother must be celebrated in a way that empowers her and recognises her role in the formation of the psyche, whilst simultaneously women who chose not to have children should not be seen as abnormal or lacking through their decision not to procreate. To do so would reinforce patriarchy's positioning of the mythical maternal as the goal for women. This is an incredibly important issue for feminism in the twenty-first century, with the rise of social media and 'mummy-bloggers' once more placing increasing pressure on women to become 'supermothers': to aspire to an Instagram-ready version of motherhood that is often highly fabricated and hides or ignores the many difficulties that parents face when raising a child. Subsequently, although an increased understanding and acceptance of the importance of the symbiotic union is highly needed, what could be considered as even more critical is the knowledge of how patriarchal society operates to cover over that importance and continue the subjugation of women. Through the horror and extreme cinema examined in this thesis it has been possible to explore how the making abject of the mother's body and the creation of the mythical ideal maternal is one of the ways that this subjugation is carried out.

This split created by patriarchy between the biological body of the mother and the mythical maternal is one of three key themes running through this thesis. Highlighted

in Freud's mythical view of the maternal womb, but clearly illustrated in the films discussed, and somewhat problematically featuring in the work of other theorists such as Kristeva, the split between the mythical maternal and the biological mother has continually been used to assuage the love for the mother for a patriarchal society that is built on its denial. As explored in my analysis of Breillat's work and Irigaray's critique of Freudian phallocentrism, the love for the mother presents a threat to patriarchal society as it challenges concepts of origin and feminine passivity in the reproductive process. By splitting the mother in two this love can be projected on to the powerless mythical maternal, whilst the actual living body of the mother is rejected and oppressed. But as with the continual attempts to repress the womb phantasy, the mother does not go down without a fight, and as can be seen in films such as the Korean family narratives of the 1960s, or the pregnant protagonists of French horror cinema, the two sides of the maternal continually mix and blur, revealing the strength of the original desire for the mother that can never be fully repressed. Freud's proposition that it is destroyed appears to be just a sign of his own repression of this fact.

The second key theme of this thesis is the similarity in manner in which the womb is utilised, suggested and symbolically represented across the four countries studied. The various manifestations of the use of the womb all work on the basis of oppositions, good vs. bad. But these oppositions take on different meanings across the films. For example, many works in this thesis feature cupboards as a primary site of action. Ghosts may use a cupboard to access the living world, or to pull a person into the spiritual realm, such as in *Poltergeist* or *Insidious 2*. The cupboard may be used as an attempt to re-establish the symbiotic union, as in *Carrie*, or as a symbol of the departure from it, such as in *Halloween*. From the analysis of these divisions, and the

various manifestations of the symbolic womb in horror and extreme cinema, one thing becomes clear: the symbiotic union – represented by womb symbolism – is presented as a threat, but simultaneously something that is desired. What this thesis has revealed is the patriarchal disavowal of the desire to return to the symbiotic union, how even in a genre that many critics have seen as inherently misogynistic, this misogyny is often driven by a desire to return the maternal embrace. At times this desire is deeply repressed, exposed only through close analysis of the texts, at others it is dealt with directly. The benefit of a cross-national approach is that the need to repress the love for the mother operates at different levels and in different manners across varying countries. This allows for the consistencies to be highlighted, which in turn refers back to the one shared human experience, the symbiotic bond with another (be they mother or primary care-giver/s) during the first few months of life.

Finally, the third theme that runs through this thesis is the importance of the womb phantasy to the formation of the psyche. In this thesis I have proposed that it is possible to read Anzieu's concept of the Skin Ego, Doi's theory of *amae*, Mahler's separation-individuation phase, and Chung and Cho's understanding of *jeong*, as variations of the womb phantasy. Further to this, the varying psychoanalytic theory that I have utilised indicate that womb phantasy should be considered not as a primal phantasy (and the least important one at that, as Freud appears to suggest), but as the original human phantasy that marks the entry into subjective thought. Mahler's work suggests that immediately after birth the child goes through a period of what I have termed a 'womb delusion', where it still considers itself to be inside the womb, its brain and nervous system not yet able to distinguish between exterior and interior stimulation. An important shift then occurs: the child starts to be able to distinguish itself as separate to the mother, and from then on it *wants* to be with her. The child

has moved from being in a womb delusion to a womb phantasy, continually desiring to reunite with their mother. In the same manner, in *The Anatomy of Dependence* Doi argues that *amae* is an emotion that is first felt at the mother's breast during early childhood, yet it can only be experienced once the child starts to become aware of its surroundings and its mother as a separate being. Therefore, at the same time that Mahler was developing her theory of symbiosis and just prior to Anzieu's first publication on the Skin Ego, Doi too proposes a desire that seeks to return to the embrace of the mother child dyad, from a womb delusion to a womb phantasy. *Amae* could also be seen as akin to *mo-jeong*, the experience of the mother-child bond that Christopher Chung and Samson Cho see as foundational to Korean society. This bond is not Oedipal – dictated by incestuous desire or murderous feelings – but is a bond that exists before any concept of gender, sexuality or difference. It is just the desire to be loved.

This is the legacy and heritage of the womb: it is not that humans come from something monstrous, deadly and abject, but actually from a place that is the symbol of love, care and devotion. In contrast to Freud, the psychoanalytic theorists that I have drawn on argue that the desire to return to the maternal womb is not driven by a sexual wish to penetrate the mother, but by a desire for care and love. This desire is not repressed, but lives on as the foundation and origin of the human sense of self. As the countries studied in this thesis all operate under a patriarchal system, this power of the symbiotic union stands as a potential threat to homosocial culture. The films analysed throughout have provided evidence for the pivotal position that the symbiotic relationship occupies, whilst simultaneously the use of psychoanalytic theory beyond Freud has allowed for a far greater understanding of the role of the womb, womb symbolism and the maternal in cinema. The womb is often represented

as monstrous in horror and extreme cinema, but now we have a greater understanding as to why, and it is not due to its monstrosity at all.

Appendix

Film Synopses

***À l'intérieur (Inside)*. Dir. Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo. France, La Fabrique de Films, 2007.**

In *Inside*, a young pregnant photojournalist called Sarah is left to raise her unborn child alone after she is involved in a car crash that takes the life of her husband. The night before she is due to go into hospital to give birth a woman enters her house and attempts to cut the baby out of her, leading to a fight to the death between them. The audience discovers that the woman was also in the same car crash that claimed the life of Sarah's husband, with her injuries leading to the death of her own unborn child. Now she wants Sarah's child instead. The trauma of the battle eventually leads to Sarah going into labour, but the baby gets stuck and the unnamed woman has to perform a caesarean, killing the mother to save the child.

***The Amityville Horror*. Dir. Stuart Rosenberg. USA, American International Pictures, 1979.**

In *The Amityville Horror*, George Lutz, his wife, and their three children buy a house at a reduced rate as it was the site of a mass murder where a young man killed his family. As the days go on George becomes obsessed with, and possessed by, the house, eventually trying to kill his own family, and only managing to regain his senses at the last moment so that they all escape unharmed.

***Anatomie de l'enfer (Anatomy of Hell)*. Dir. Catherine Breillat. France, CB Films, 2004.**

In *Anatomy of Hell* an unnamed woman meets a man in a gay club and offers him money if he watches her "where she is unwatchable". The couple spend four nights together in an exploration of the patriarchal view of the female body, before their agreement comes to an end. The man leaves the house, but shortly after decides to return, only to find it completely empty. He sees the woman outside and pushes her into the sea.

***Bijitô Q (Visitor Q)*. Dir. Miike Takashi. Japan, Alphaville, 2001.**

Visitor Q begins with a title card that reads "Have you ever done it with your dad?" before showing a father called Kiyoshi having sex with his prostitute daughter Miki in a comfort hotel. Kiyoshi is a failed 'salaryman', having just been fired from his job as a television journalist after being sodomised live on air with his own microphone by a gang of youths. Along with his prostitute daughter who has run away from home, his family is in the same state of ruin as his disgraced career. His wife Keiko is a heroine addict who also turns to prostitution to fund her habit, and his son Takuya is being bullied at school and violently takes out his anger on his mother, subjecting her to vicious beatings that she quietly accepts only asking for him not to touch her face. An

unknown man (Q) enters their life after hitting Kiyoshi over the head with a rock, and slowly manages to bring the family back together.

***Carrie*. Dir. Brian De Palma. USA, Red Bank Films, 1976.**

Carrie tells the story of naive Carrie and her religious fanatic mother Margaret White. Carrie is an outsider, rejected by her fellow classmates and treated as a source of annoyance by those who surround her. Her mother, obsessed with God and racked with personal hatred, has refused to teach her daughter about the 'sinful' female body, so when Carrie gets her first period in the school shower her shocked reaction incites the other girls to taunt and laugh at her. Carrie develops telekinetic powers, which she begins to use to punish, scare or control those around her. As the prom approaches, one of Carrie's classmates, Sue Snell, persuades her boyfriend to take Carrie to the dance. Carrie accepts his invitation, only to fall prey to a prank carried out by the school bitch Chris, who rigs the prom king and queen vote so that Carrie wins and then is showered in pigs blood as she collects her award. Enraged Carrie unleashes her telekinetic fury on the unsuspecting teens, destroying the school and all those inside, before returning home and killing her mother and then herself. Only Sue survives, yet she continues to be haunted by Carrie's ghost in her dreams.

***Chakushin ari (One Missed Call)*. Dir. Miike Takashi. Japan, Kadokawa-Daiei Eiga K.K., 2003.**

One Missed Call's main protagonist is a psychology student called Yumi, who was badly abused by her mother when she was a child. Yumi's friends start to fall prey to a curse that is spreading via mobile phones, killing those it affects. Yumi and a male detective called Hiroshi go on a search for the root of this curse and are led to believe that it is being controlled by the spirit of a dead mother called Marie who was accused of abusing her two daughters, Mimiko and Nanako, due to Münchhausen syndrome by proxy. One of her daughters died after an untreated asthma attack, and the other is now in a mute state at an orphanage. Upon finding the mother's corpse inside a box in a disused hospital Marie comes back to life and attacks Yumi. In a moment of intense panic Yumi hallucinates that the corpse is her own abusive mother and manages to inadvertently save herself by reassuring the ghost that she is sorry and will never leave her, after which Marie's spirit is able to leave its body and pass on. It is then revealed that it was actually the older sister Mimiko who was being abusive and that it is her spirit that is the real cause of the curse, and that she is now haunting Yumi. Hiroshi rushes back to Yumi's apartment, but during an embrace she stabs him. Mimiko has possessed Yumi's body and now plans to 'look after' Hiroshi like she cared for her sister.

***The Conjuring*. Dir. James Wan. USA, New Line Cinema, 2013.**

The Conjuring tells the story of the Perron family who have moved into a new house. Father Roger struggles to secure enough work to pay the bills, whilst mother Carolyn raises their five daughters. When exploring their new home, one of the daughters discovers a boarded up entrance to the basement in the broom-cupboard. Strange events start to happen in the house, and as the haunting escalates Carolyn visits

paranormal investigators the Warrens, and asks them for help. The Warrens discover that the estate on which the house is situated was once owned by a witch called Bathsheba, who had sacrificed her baby to the devil and then killed herself, casting a curse onto anyone who occupied her land which made mothers kill their children. Even though the family have left the house Carolyn becomes possessed by the spirit of Bathsheba and takes two of her daughters back in order to sacrifice them.

***Friday the 13th*. Dir. Sean S. Cunningham. USA, Paramount Pictures, 1980.**

In *Friday the 13th* a group of young people come to reopen and work at a summer camp called Camp Crystal Lake, only to be slaughtered one by one by an unseen killer. Resourceful 'Final Girl' Alice remains as last survivor, and as she flees the killer she stumbles into the open arms of Mrs Voorhees, a kindly woman who she believes has come to her rescue. However, she learns instead that Mrs Voorhees' son Jason attended the camp in the past and drowned in the lake. It was she who had been butchering Alice's friends all along, and now she wants to kill Alice.

***Frontière(s) (Frontier(s))*. Dir. Xavier Gens. France and Switzerland, Cartel Productions, 2007.**

Frontier(s) tells the story of four friends escaping Paris after a bungled robbery carried out during intense rioting caused by a reaction to an incoming far-right government. Attempting to reach the French border, the four friends split up, agreeing to meet at an isolated hotel, which unbeknownst to them is run by a family of neo-Nazi cannibals under the dominating control of a fascist patriarch. All four friends are ethnically not of French origin and the three men are swiftly killed by the family and eaten. Only Yasmin survives, destined to become the wife of one of the sons in order to improve the bloodline. Her own pregnancy is seen as a good omen – counteracting her Arab descent – and she is married into the family against her will. She fights to save her life, eventually killing all her captors apart from Eva, a young woman with a physical deformity who was herself kidnapped by the family.

***Hanyo (The Housemaid)*. Dir. Kim Ki-young. South Korea, Hanguk Munye Yeonghwa, 1960.**

The Housemaid tells the story of a music teacher called Dong-sik and his wife, who are struggling to raise the money to finish building their new Western style two-storey house. The wife falls pregnant and soon becomes too exhausted to look after the house after finishing her own paid work, so the husband hires a housemaid called Myong-ja. The maid manipulates and seduces Dog-sik and they have sex, leading to her falling pregnant. Dong-sik tells his wife of the pregnancy and she convinces Myong-ja to abort her child by throwing herself down the stairs. The maid does so, and once physically recovered, begins to exact revenge on the family. The family put up with the increasingly monstrous actions of Myong-ja, desperate for their secret to not be revealed in public. Eventually, in order to save his wife from shame Dong-sik agrees to commit suicide with Myong-ja, and they both die after drinking poison.

***Honogurai mizu no soko kara (Dark Water).* Dir. Nakata Hideo. Japan, Kadokawa Shoten Publishing Co., 2002.**

In *Dark Water* single-mother Yoshimi has just started a new job as a proof-reader to support her daughter Ikuko. Yoshimi is halfway through a bitter divorce from a manipulative husband who is trying to gain custody of Ikuko. Yoshimi was neglected as a child, with her mother eventually leaving their family, and Yoshimi is determined not to do the same to Ikuko. She attempts to give them both a fresh start by moving into a new apartment together and getting a job. As they settle into their new home Yoshimi begins to suspect that their flat is haunted by the water-logged ghost of a young girl called Mitsuko, who had also been abandoned by her own mother and had disappeared two years previously. Mitsuko's haunting presence becomes more and more threatening towards Ikuko, endangering her life and leading Yoshimi to investigate her disappearance. Yoshimi discovers Mitsuko's body in the water tank on top of the building and is only able to stop her killing Ikuko by abandoning her daughter and becoming a mother to Mitsuko in the spirit world.

***Imprint.* Dir. Miike Takashi. USA and Japan, IDT Entertainment, 2006.**

Set in Japan in an indistinct period in the past, *Imprint* follows the story of an American journalist called Christopher who is trying to find his prostitute lover Komomo. Christopher travels to a depraved island brothel, where the women are kept as slaves, forced to sell sex in order to survive, with suicide, punishment and torture all being part of this horrific life. He fails to find Komomo and instead is looked after by an unnamed scarred prostitute. The disfigured prostitute tells three versions of her own history and the events that lead to Komomo's demise. The first is a sad, but ultimately love-filled narrative with tragic results, and the second a horrific tale of abuse and corruption, and the third is one of evil.

In the first version of the story of her childhood she tells Christopher that her mother worked as a midwife in order to support her and her ill father. The prostitute's father was so sick that one night he walked out into the river by their home to die so that he would not be a burden to his family any more. Even after her father's death her mother was still not able to provide for her daughter so she was forced to sell her in order to try and give her a better life. In this version of the story the other prostitutes bully Komomo, stealing a ring belonging to the madam and setting her up as the perpetrator of the crime. Under the madam's instruction they gruesomely torture the innocent Komomo, before she hangs herself after finally succumbing to the belief that Christopher will never return for her.

Christopher refuses to believe this story and demands that the prostitute tells the truth. She then begins the second version of events, describing how it was she who stole the expensive item, with Komomo seeing her do so. The scarred prostitute then steals Komomo's hairpin and gives it to the madam, claiming to have found it in the woman's room, incriminating her. In this version of the story she reveals that she was actually the one to murder Komomo, strangling her with a rope to put her out of her misery. Christopher, enraged with the prostitute, still refuses to believe her story. A mysterious voice instructs the woman to "tell him the truth", and she continues with the second version of the horrific events, this time re-telling the story of her childhood. Her parents were actually brother and sister, travelling around the

countryside begging until they settled in a remote riverside shack. The prostitute's mother carried out abortions for the local women, and her father was a physically and sexually abusive drunk. After he raped his daughter she killed him, beating him to death. It is at this point that *Imprint* takes a more surreal turn. The prostitute reveals that she has a conjoined twin in the form of a hand with eyes and a mouth that extends from her head, usually hidden by her elaborate hairstyle. In her third version of events the prostitute explains how this evil twin encourages her to carry out sinful deeds. It was the twin who actually killed their father, and it was the twin who stole the madam's ring.

***Janghwa, Hongryeon (A Tale of Two Sisters).* Dir. Kim Jee-woon. South Korea, B.O.M. Film Productions Co., 2003.**

In *A Tale of Two Sisters*, sisters Su-mi and Su-yeon return home after being in hospital. Welcomed by an apathetic father and overbearing stepmother Eun-ju, the two troubled girls find it hard to settle into their new family arrangement. Su-mi is being haunted by a ghostly figure that crawls around her bed, whilst also believing that the stepmother has been harming Su-yeon, and indeed the older woman is shown locking the young girl into a large cupboard. However, at the end of the film it is revealed that not only is Su-yeon actually dead, but that both she and the stepmother are just incarnations of Su-mi's multiple personality disorder brought about by the death of Su-yeon and their real mother.

***Maoui gyedan (The Devil's Stairway).* Dir. Lee Man-hee. South Korea, Seki Trading Co., 1964.**

Set in a hospital, *The Devil's Stairway* is the story of a doctor called Gwang-ho who ends his secret relationship with a nurse after the owner of the hospital offers him his daughter's hand in marriage (and therefore the future control of the hospital). However, his lover Jin-sook informs him that she is pregnant and after a struggle on the stairway of the hospital she falls and miscarries the baby. Gwang-ho then attempts to murder Jin-sook to cover up his sordid past by drugging her and drowning her in a nearby pond. Believing her to be dead, he is then haunted by Jin-sook's ghost wherever he goes, driving him to the point of madness. His new wife consults a psychiatrist about his mental state, only for Gwang-ho to argue that she has gone behind his back and he pushes her down the same staircase. He performs surgery on her to try to correct his ill deeds but sees Jin-sook in a nurse's gown and flees the operating room, and then falls down the stairs himself. It is then revealed on those very steps that Jin-sook is alive and was actually rescued from death by the head nurse who helped her to get revenge on Gwang-ho by pretending to be a *wonhon*.

***Ôdishon (Audition).* Dir. Miike Takashi. Japan, Basara Pictures, 1999.**

In *Audition* Aoyama, a widower with a teenage son Shigekiko, decides to search for a new wife. Unwilling to organise an arranged marriage and too impatient to date, Aoyama uses his profession as a television producer to organise an audition for a non-existent film titled *Tomorrow's Heroine* so that he may secretly interview future

brides. He is instantly drawn to the application of an ex-dancer called Asami. Even though his friend warns him that the information she has provided is false he still courts her, and after a few dates he decides to propose. He takes her away to a hotel by the sea intent on asking her to marry him, but once the couple has had sex for the first time, Asami disappears. Aoyama's attempts to find her fail, but on returning home he is drugged and then tortured by Asami. Shigekiko discovers his mutilated father and pushes Asami down the stairs, breaking her neck.

***Poltergeist*. Dir. Tobe Hooper. USA, MGM, 1982.**

In *Poltergeist* Steve Freeling works as a salesman for a new property development. Unaware that their house has been built on a desecrated graveyard, the family begins to witness paranormal activity. The youngest daughter Carol Anne is in communication with the disgruntled spirits and is sucked into the spirit world within the house. Mother and father, with the help of a psychic called Tangina and a team of investigators, manage to rescue Carol Anne, and the family escapes as the house implodes in front of them.

***Pon (Phone)*. Dir. Ahn Byung-ki. South Korea, Toilet Pictures, 2002.**

In *Phone* an investigative reporter called Ji-won takes some time off from her work after successfully breaking a story about a ring of paedophiles, one of which has begun to stalk her. She takes refuge in the empty new house of her close friend Ho-jung so that she can finish a writing project in peace. Ho-jung is happily married to Chang-hoon, and the couple have a daughter together called Young-ju. However, it is revealed during the film that the girl is actually Ji-won's biological child as she donated an egg to the infertile Ho-jung. One day when they are out Young-ju answers Ji-won's new phone, only to hear strange noises from the other end of the line. The young girl is then possessed by the spirit of Jin-hee, a young schoolgirl who Ji-won discovers was having an affair with Chang-hoon. Young-ju starts to exhibit strange Oedipal behaviour towards her parents; flirting with her father and behaving viciously to her mother. Simultaneously, Ji-won discovers that Young-ju is not Jin-hee's first victim, and that two other people who had her phone number have died. At the climax of the film Ji-won discovers Jin-hee's body inside the walls of her friend's house. Ho-jung had found out about the affair and Jin-hee's pregnancy, and after a struggle she pushed the girl down the stairs before sealing her into the walls of their new family home.

***Psycho*. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. USA, Shamley Productions, 1960.**

Psycho tells the story of a young woman, Marion Crane, who steals \$40,000 so that she can marry her lover Sam in California. On her way to meet him she stops for the night at a motel run by the quiet Norman Bates and his unseen but overpowering mother. Mrs Bates murders Marion in the shower, and her disappearance incites Sam, her sister Lila, and a private detective called Arbogast to look for her. Arbogast is also stabbed by the matriarch, before Sam and Lila come to the motel and discover the rotten corpse of Mrs Bates in the cellar, revealing that the real killer was Norman all

along. The final sequence of *Psycho* depicts the incarceration of Norman as the police try to uncover precisely what went on at the Bates Motel. Offering an explanation to the officers – and the film’s audience – a psychiatrist claims that Norman no longer exists, as he now believes himself to be his mother.

***Regarde la mer (See the Sea)*. Dir. François Ozon. France, Fidélité Productions, 1997.**

In *See the Sea* Sasha – a British mother holidaying with her daughter Sioffra on a French island – is waiting for her husband to return from working in Paris. A lone female backpacker turns up at the house and asks to camp in Sasha’s garden (as with Sasha, this woman remains unnamed in the film yet she is called Tatiana by Ozon and de Van who plays her). Over the next few days a friendship develops between the two women, but it is one that slowly reveals Sasha’s repressed sexuality and Tatiana’s maternally orientated violent psychosis. After telling her that she had an abortion Tatiana kills Sasha, mutilates her body and leaves with the baby. The film’s final scene is of Tatiana leaving the island dressed in Sasha’s clothes and holding a crying Sioffra.

***Ringu (Ring)*. Dir. Nakata Hideo. Japan, Basara Pictures, 1998.**

In *Ring*, Reiko is a single-mother holding down a job as a television journalist. Reiko is researching a cursed video that, once watched, will entail that the viewer receives a phone call and then dies in exactly seven days. After Reiko’s niece is found dead in similar circumstances, Reiko travels to a holiday park and discovers the copy of the tape that she saw. She watches it and falls under the curse. Enlisting the help of her ex-husband Ryuji to find a way to lift the curse, her neglect of her son Yoichi entails that he watches the video too. Reiko and Ryuji attempt to decode the images contained in the video and travel to an island where they discover the true story behind the curse: a young girl called Sadako was attacked by her father, pushed down a well, and left to die. Returning to the holiday camp they find the well under a cabin and discover the body of Sadako at the bottom. However, even though Reiko survives, Ryuji is still killed by the ghost of Sadako, leading Reiko to realise that to survive you must make a copy of the tape and show it to someone else, reproducing the curse. The film ends with Reiko calling her father to ask for a favour to help save Yoichi’s life.

***Romance*. Dir. Catherine Breillat. France, Flach Films, 1999.**

Romance’s female protagonist Marie is in a sexless relationship with her male-model boyfriend Paul, and begins to seek out new sexual experiences as a means to assert some power over her love for him. She has a brief love affair with Paulo, Paul’s alter-ego, before engaging in sado-masochistic bondage carried out by Robert, the head teacher at the school where she works. At the end of the film she is impregnated by Paul and then causes his death through a gas explosion that happens at the same moment as their son is born.

***The Shining*. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. USA and UK, Warner Bros., 1980.**

In *The Shining* the Torrance family become caretakers of a vast and isolated hotel for the winter so that the father (Jack) can work on his writing. His son Danny has psychic abilities and is warned by his imaginary friend Tony that the hotel is a bad place. Jack slowly comes under the power of the hotel and attempts to kill his wife (Wendy) and son. Danny outwits his father, and mother and son manage to escape together leaving Jack to freeze to death in the hotel maze.

***Une vraie jeune fille (A Real Young Girl)*. Dir. Catherine Breillat. France, Artédis, 1976.**

A Real Young Girl follows 14 year-old Alice on her holiday from boarding school, staying with her parents in a remote part of France. Alice falls for a young worker at her father's lumberyard called Jim, fantasising about him and his potential taking of her virginity. The couple get together but before the deflowering can commence, Jim is accidentally shot by a device set up by Alice's father to kill the pigs eating his crops. Alice, unperturbed by Jim's death, packs up her belongings and returns to school.

Myths and Legends

The Story of Janghwa and Hongryeon

In this tale a widower has two daughters, Rose and Lotus. He decides to remarry, but his new wife is ugly and selfish, and despises the girls. This stepmother has three sons of her own and plots to get rid of Rose and Lotus. First she catches a rat, skins it, and then hides it in Rose's bed. She then tells the father that the girl has shamed her family and had an abortion, showing the bloodied body in the bed as evidence. The father sends Rose to her grandmother's, a journey to be taken with one of the stepmother's sons. However the wicked woman has hatched a plan with her son to kill Rose and he takes her to a pond and tries to push her in. Rose fights back, but knowing that she is powerless against the son, she takes her own life by jumping into the water saying "My dear lost mother, now I come to join you... Now I shall become a spirit of the waters".¹ As she jumps into the pond and dies, a strange wind blows over the area and a tiger jumps out and mauls the son, dismembering his arm, leg and ear. Lotus is not told anything about the events at the pond, yet she dreams of the water, and a dragon that rises out of it. When Rose's fate is finally revealed, Lotus vows to go and join her sister in the spirit world. She makes her way to the pond but when she arrives she hears her sister's voice telling her not to jump in. Lotus refuses to listen and commits suicide too by jumping in the water.

As time goes on the village suffers a terrible fate as its magistrates keep on dying, one after another. These men are visited by the two sisters, yet their deaths are not to do with any ill-deeds, rather the ghostly apparitions of these girls give these weak

¹ Zong Im-sob, 'Two Sisters, Rose and Lotus,' *Folk Tales from Korea*, 3rd ed. (Elizabeth, New Jersey: Hollym International, 1986), 203.

men heart-attacks. A brave official called Zong is sent to investigate these deaths and is visited too by the ghost of Lotus. Zong listens to the girl's story, arresting the father and stepmother and demanding to see the aborted baby as evidence. He discovers that it is only a rat, but even though the father admits the truth, the stepmother refuses to do so. The stepmother and her son are then sentenced to death. The father is acquitted, and goes to find the bodies of his daughters. They are perfectly preserved in the pond, and he takes them to be buried properly so that their souls may rise to heaven. The father then takes a new wife who is a nice young girl. The ghosts of his two dead daughters return to their father one more time in a dream, saying that they were once spirits of the water, then they rose to heaven, but now they must be born again. The father awakens from this dream and goes to see his new wife, who has a rose and a lotus in her hands, saying that a fairy queen gave them to her in a dream. The new wife is now pregnant with twin girls: the reincarnations of Rose and Lotus.

Prince Ajase

This is the tale of a queen who selfishly desires a child so that she may retain the attention of her husband. After being told that a sage will die in three years time and be reincarnated as her son, she grows impatient and kills the old man. Before he dies the sage puts a curse on the queen, telling her that once reincarnated as her son, he will kill the king. When she has given birth she becomes scared that the murdered sage might seek his revenge and attempts unsuccessfully to kill her child. Her failure to do so forces her to accept her fate and she becomes a devoted mother. When her son, Ajase, grows up and hears the story of his conception and birth he attempts to kill the mother he once idolised. He too fails and suffers from an immense guilt, bringing on a disease so repulsive that only his mother will come near him. She continues to show him such love and devotion that he forgives her for her actions, and she his, uniting them in forgiveness.

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